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The Oldham Road Rephotography Project

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PhD by Existing Published Works.

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Abstract

This PhD by prior publication comprises a major rephotography project undertaken in two phases (*First View*, 1986-89 and *Second View*, 2009-12), together with a written commentary. The project is based on an area along the A62 which connects Manchester to Oldham, a corridor route, which I considered invisible and between places, a seeming 'non place'.¹ The research questions how can topographic images made by adopting strategies of rephotography help to depict aspects of place that remain hidden in generic representations and how, in turn, this photographic record can be put to use.

The accompanying critical commentary investigates how this project came to be realised, the photographic research methodologies employed, and relevant contextual frameworks together with the different contexts through which the work has been disseminated and shared. It considers what the practice of rephotography contributes as a visual research method when analysing the shifting topography of a specific urban corridor. Further to this, it suggests ways in which such rephotography can engage different audiences and communities in debate about lived experience of social and economic change.

The *First View* photographic research project was initially conducted by making a series of visits to the area each year recording transformation through redevelopment projects and subtler changes such as incidental events on the street and the variations of seasons. The project took an ethnographic approach to human involvement with place and space (Massey, D. 1994) as well as drawing upon anthropological methods that employ photography as a research tool (Prosser, J. 1998). Outputs from this project demonstrate processes adopted and examples of the photography made. A selection of photographs from *First View* became a touring exhibition shown in Oldham and Manchester (1986-87) and then in London. A book was also published by the Architectural Association (1987) with a commentary written by Ian Jeffrey.

The second view (2009-12) revisits the first survey and considers what happened after. I wanted to consider twenty five years on how the continued process of change may have increasingly eroded/alterd the sense of place

¹ This term derives from Marc Augé's book, *Lieux et Non-Lieux* (2001).

within the community. Since the *First View* a number of external factors influenced how the research would continue. The political scene had changed with introduction of private initiatives and housing associations taking responsibility to manage and refurbish aging housing stock in the public sector closer to the Manchester and in areas towards Oldham. Further cleared areas remained undeveloped due to a major financial downturn. Also the adoption of digital technologies had changed how photography was made, viewed, and used. This led me to consider how the *Second View* could be more collaborative (Kester, G. 2011) and so modify my method and find new ways to interact with members of the community to help inform the work.

Outputs included exhibitions at Gallery Oldham and The People's History Museum, Manchester and an accompanying commentary written by Stephen Hanson. I also include reviews and examples of additional collaborative photography made and shown alongside the core exhibitions. Examples of the printed work are now housed in Oldham library (including the complete set of *Second View* exhibition prints, contact sheets and this written report). It is permanently accessible for public and academic use under a commons license.

Although it can be argued that all photographic practice contains elements of rephotography, this project contributes to original knowledge through analysis of processes used to make the first long-term comparative and detailed photographic study of the *Oldham Road* as an area exemplifying shift from industrialisation to service provision. 'Hermeneutic perspectives emphasise photographs as texts, demanding semantic and semiotic interpretation to determine meaning' (Margolis and Rowe, 2012).

The corridor is now undergoing further changes as new projects by housing associations and globalised business begin to fill the spaces left by previous clearances. My published work shows connections, continuities and breakages and new questions emerge about what values are worth preserving for a future community. I suggest that a continuing photographic element can contribute to an understanding of incidental detail that can influence a more sensitive management of infrastructure and potentially help residents adjust to change and thus maintain their sense of place.

The Oldham Road Rephotography Project.

1 – Introduction

1.1 Outline Description.

This research commentary reviews an extended photography project that investigated an urban area that was undergoing significant socio-economic change. The photography initially carried out in the mid 1980s was later revisited twenty-five years on. The work's two linked phases, referred to as the *First* and *Second Views*,² were an extended visual exploration that used different strategies of rephotography. This process helped register and explore aspects of the layered histories evidenced by changing architectural styles in housing and industrial enterprises that play out alongside each other on the street (1986-89 and 2009-12).

The work exists as a publicly accessible archive in the collection of Gallery Oldham that consists of photographic negatives made over the two periods, contact sheets and edited prints³. The archive also contains the original prints exhibited in the exhibitions associated with the two *views* (as described in the later chapters). A printed version of this thesis and the original supporting material (in the appendices) has been added to the archive. Sample images will be made available on the web under a creative commons license.

The outcomes from the research culminated in *First View* exhibitions (1987) by the Cornerhouse, Manchester, Gallery Oldham, The Architectural Association, London and Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, USA (2000). A book was published by the Architectural Association in London (1987). The *Second View* exhibitions were held in Gallery Oldham (2011-12) and The People's History Museum, Manchester (2012-13). In 2014 an archive of all the research and exhibited photography was placed with Gallery Oldham on permanent loan as an open access resource.

In this commentary, I review how the project came about and what the practice of rephotography contributes as a visual research method when investigating social change and shifting notions of 'place'. I describe how the methodology

² Terms suggested by in the Klett *et al* rephotography project 1977.

³ Access by appointment.

adapts as experience grows and how it adjusts to accommodate additional inputs from community and audience. This, in turn, has helped to further identify usefulness and value in rephotography as research process. As I suggest more fully in the concluding Chapter Five, this method of rephotography has the potential to be used in future research to provide insights to help residents and planners adapt to social and economic change in post-industrial areas of redevelopment.

Throughout the two phases of rephotography, I adopted an approach which is subjective and reflexive. This process accepts that while acting as participant observer, personal experiences contributed to the research and that choice (in this case what to photograph and how the photographs could be edited) in any research of this kind will be subjective. Additionally, knowledge and experience gained from previous exhibitions, my processes of encounter and thinking around the politics of the day had an influence on what happened, what was photographed.

The photographs made and published during this extended period of investigation consider how topographic images can help to depict aspects of place that remain overshadowed by generic representations as discussed more fully in Chapter Three. I chose an area along a nine mile stretch of road (A62) which connects Manchester to Oldham, an area which was normally undocumented and invisible because it was between places, a seeming 'non place'.⁴ The skyline was traditionally dominated by the red brick chimneys and water towers of cotton spinning mills built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the industry had been in decline since the First World War, the mills had increasingly become redundant and were being demolished. Coupled with this, more recent areas of social housing were being refurbished or cleared for new development. The area subsequently had become a mix of redevelopment projects which appeared to have no regional identity and had no coherent plan.

During the *Second View*, I organised two photography projects which included photography made by members of a local history group and also a youth group

⁴ This term derives from Marc Augé's book *Lieux et Non-Lieux* (2001).

that operated close to the Oldham road. This participatory work in the *Second View* introduced an auto-ethnographic element to the project in which communities were involved more actively in the co-production of the research extending the practice of rephotography. Example images were placed in the exhibitions in Oldham and Manchester (2012-13).

1.2 The Oldham Road *First View* Aims.

1. To photographically investigate the post-industrial area bordering the A62 linking Manchester with Oldham.
2. To photographically document structural changes brought on by shifting social and working practices during the mid 1980s and to make a photographic record evidencing a contemporary view of this area.
3. Through a sustained series of fieldwork visits, to search out and photograph the ordinary and the incidental in detail.
4. To revisit locations and build knowledge as an ongoing process of daily observation over a number of years.
5. To build an archive of images which could be accessed and published in exhibition and book form.

The *Oldham Road Project* was initially conducted by making a series of visits to the area each year (1986-89) recording transformation through redevelopment projects and subtler changes such as incidental events on the street and seasonal variation. As will be seen more fully in Chapter Two, the project, in this first phase, took an urban/environmental anthropological approach adopting fieldwork as a method. Fieldwork 'can involve many of the senses particularly the sounds, smells and visual aspects of the culture' (Ball in Prosser, 1998:135). I was interested in seeking out examples of human involvement with place and space (Massey, 1994:126) drawing upon methods that employ photography as a qualitative research tool (Prosser, 1998). Acting as an outside observer and making repeated visits over an extended period of time, I photographed and rephotographed situations while walking the street.

During the *First View*, areas of old terraced housing were being demolished and a policy of greening post-industrial land was in operation. *Terrains vagues*

became the 'countryside on your doorstep' (GMC roadside poster 1988)⁵.

Some more recent post war estates were also being demolished because they too had become run-down and families were increasingly fragmented through rehousing to estates outside the area. With traditional work patterns in decline, little practical assistance had been given to the communities that were formed by and depended on them.⁶ According to G. Kester, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's now infamous statement that 'there is no such thing as society' suggests that 'civil society as such has no relevance in the neoliberal worldview.' (Kester, G. 2011:119).

1.3 The Oldham Road *Second View*.

The *Second View* (2009-12) revisits the first survey and considers what happened after. Twenty-five years on I wanted to reflect on how the changed economy had impacted on the area. I began by revisiting previously photographed locations to search out what remained from the *First View* and to then photograph subsequent development overlaying the disappearing infrastructure with the past. My increased experience as a working photographer and knowledge gained through feedback from the *First View* (description in chapter three) encouraged changes to the methodology for the *Second View*. I was now in a position to be able to show work from the *First View* to members of the community which created discussion and understanding informing how to proceed. This also provided an opportunity to test out how the photographs were viewed. I had become aware of how images can help elicit description (Harper, 2002) and hoped to discover if photographs can collectively be used to help identify significance of contemporary locations including ruined industrial architecture and local infrastructure such as shops, public houses and abandoned centres of entertainment that might otherwise be unnoticed and undervalued.

⁵ At this time, the Greater Manchester Council had an ongoing greening policy to clean up post-industrial sites close to urban development.

⁶ 'I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. "I have a problem, I'll get a grant. I'm homeless, the government must house me." They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society...' (Margaret Thatcher interview for Women's Own magazine, October 31 1987).

Since the *First View*, I had also become more aware of examples where rephotography had been used as a research process to investigate previous photographic practice. The *Rephotographic Survey Project* (1970) is a notable example which involved finding the exact locations previously photographed by pioneer photographers. In this second phase, I aimed to develop and adapt strategies of rephotography appropriate to this stage of the project.⁷ For example, this process could show how the landscape changed in areas that had undergone previous landscaping and environmental improvement schemes and track the further removal of redundant infrastructure.

Newly adopted digital processes meant that making and viewing images could be almost instantaneous and that anyone with access to the technology could potentially participate. The technology had changed perceptions of professionalism and the role of photography when working and communicating in a digital environment. The ease with which photography could now be altered and authenticity questioned would impact on how the work would be disseminated and accessed in the future. This had implications on the project in helping me consider how I could increase participation so as to create a sense that the imagery and its reading would be perceived as *shared experience* within the community, therefore extending beyond an outsider's view.

Second View Aims:

1. To further explore rephotography as a method to describe place as a continuing discursive process.
2. To use walking as a research method. The Oldham Road still retains residual infrastructure and it remains possible to walk in this area. The car has not completely come to dominate the space.⁸ (As will be seen, walking was as key component of the *First View*. However, by the *Second View* it became a more conscious research method).
3. To develop participatory methods that link living memory of place (one lifetime as opposed to archived history) acknowledging ongoing flux of changing population and working practices.

⁷ A detailed description in Chapter Two.

⁸ Modernist ideas about zoning in urban planning separated the car from the inhabitants. Pedestrianisation, though largely welcome, can isolate the local shops from passing gaze and potential sales.

4. To develop participatory photography by local residents and through elicitation of photographs to discuss and value ongoing experience.
5. To reactivate the existing archive produced in the *First View* and combine with the *Second View* photography to form an extended archive as a publicly accessible collection in Gallery Oldham and online.

1.4 Reviewing Previous Projects.

In Chapter Three (contextual) I will review photographic practices and visual styles that have influenced my approach including experience gained from my previous projects such as *The Changing Land* (1974-6), *Moors and Reservoirs* (1980-83), *Passages of Time* (1984-85), and my role as photographer/observer.⁹ I will review written texts that accompanied both subsequent exhibitions and the publication of a book by the Architectural Association about the *First View*. Reconsidering these *First View* images provided an historical distance that informed the *Second View*. The images began to operate as *aides-mémoires* and therefore were central to my practical methodology. The editing or sequencing of the work also directed a particular narrative raising questions about what happened next rather than providing a fixed definition about place. Feedback from the *First View* and experiences while talking with people on the street during the *Second View* made me increasingly interested in how the work could be used in more participatory situations.

1.5 The Oldham Road: Research Questions.

1. How can rephotography contribute to an understanding of processes of urban development and regeneration in a historical and social context?
2. In what ways can rephotography help identify social connections with place that would otherwise be overlooked?

⁹ Not everything that is observed is photographed or if photographed chosen to be exhibited. The photographs stand as examples of situations that can be repeatedly observed in different ways.

3. Could this process help residents maintain connections by linking their experiential past with the present even though gaps appeared in the landscape?
4. Can rephotography also log changes in the way that photography is understood and used?
5. In what ways can the insights and understanding produced through rephotography become useful?
6. How can the accumulated photographic data be revisited and reused?

1.6 Summary and Contribution.

1. Rephotography as detailed observation developing over time.

The *First View* involved two stages of photography. The first comprised of an introductory period of research including making photographs while walking the area and making repeated visits during different seasons and years. The second stage involved reviewing the primary findings and then rephotography of chosen locations in more detail using a plate camera.

2. Rephotography – revisiting and reactivating the ‘archive’/data.

In the *Second View*, previous photography is used as extended context in developing different strategies of rephotography and incorporating more engaged/participatory processes to extend use value. The *Second View* revisits locations previously photographed and responds to changes that have taken place (or not) since the *First View*. Members of the local community are invited to participate in the ongoing rephotography including engagement in viewing and responding to the imagery and making their own photographs to add to the archive. This development of the methodology led to questions such as – how to read these images to help understand and create debate about sense of place. As will be argued more fully in Chapter Four, rephotography can be an interpretive process that can help to define issues to do with adapting to changes brought on by redevelopment and create new insights into details of place.

3. Archive.

This collection is an important outcome and contribution – accessible and re-usable by organisations, groups and individuals – a new public record.

This research report will analyse how this project was originally conceived and the methods which were adopted and later revised. The originality of this research is in the analysis of the combined processes which were reflexive, based on personal experience from making images for both views and responding to additional experience gained through increased local participation in intervening years. The core practice includes the initial exploration of the area, searching out key locations of photographic interest. I later returned to selected places and made constructed large format images for the *First View*. I then revisited those places twenty-five years on, continuing the practice of street view, day-to-day narrative followed by rephotography of previous specific locations. This process is unusual because of the amount of attention given to a seeming non-place where there is little or no documentation outside of an occasional journalistic record about reported events. The *Second View* also presents a method that embeds and values photography made by local residents as part of an ongoing record and as an element of rephotography. In the concluding chapter I propose that this co-production of documented experiences provides research possibilities about how to describe and revalue aspects of personal experience as collective in helping to plan and adjust to environmental change.

As I will argue, my previous knowledge of the process of rephotography usually relied on a comparison with historic archived material that tends to divide the past from the contemporary view and almost exclusively requires direct comparison via the same viewpoint, a then and now approach. The work undertaken by Klett *et al*¹⁰ is an example of this process where they return to the exact same place to record change over an extended period and seek out places previously photographed by others. Although I use this same technique of returning to specific location, I chose to adapt this process to include material from the original research and move to ‘near positions’ where parts of the original image are included but the changed viewpoint allows other details to emerge and so extend the dialogue. Through increased participation with local

¹⁰ Discussed in Chapter Three.

residents, I found this process encouraged a reflexive, informed continuation of the role of observer allowing for new discoveries and providing a different view on the nature of the district normally encountered through traditional archived material and mediated imagery. Throughout the process I worked with medium and large format cameras and although the digital process was adopted to make the *Second View* exhibition prints, I decided to stick with film so that the subsequent work could be viewed with technical and aesthetic consistency.

The A62 corridor is now undergoing further changes as new projects by housing associations and globalised business enterprise begin to fill the gaps left from previous clearances. My published work that was made within two decades now shows connections, continuities, and gaps. Further questions emerge about what is worth preserving for a future community.

2 – Methodologies

‘The beauty and fascination of the photograph is that, like a ghost, it occupies a realm between reality, memory and imagination: it is both a residue of a past moment caught in light, a commemoration of that moment, and a frame for our imaginative engagement with it’ (Wray, 2012:105).

This chapter describes methods that were adopted to carry out this rephotography project across the period of the two views (1984-2014). As the project advanced, processes were reviewed and adapted as conditions changed and new experience and ideas were gained. This reflexive process helped me adapt to changing circumstances and add depth to the work.

2.1 Visual Fieldwork Methods.

When I began the *First View* in 1983, I used visual observation and photography to compile a series of images in an attempt to describe the process of change and redevelopment taking place centred along a nine mile stretch of road (A62) which connects Manchester with Oldham. At this early stage I was not looking for trends or fixed meaning, but acting as participant observer (Karwulich, B. 2005) and, making repeated visits, I wished to compile a series of photographs that described what I found in an open and unbiased way. My observations became reflexive as new experience informed my understanding of place and this influenced what was photographed next.

2.1.1 Field Notes and Site Visits.

I started by visiting and photographing details and events which I collected as photographic field notes made on regular twice monthly visits. I had previously adopted this method on similar projects such as *Passages of Time* (1980)¹¹, an exploration of North East Lancashire centred on Burnley and the surrounding area. This extended process allows for specific observations and chance encounters not to be treated as special or significant at an early stage but to remain as visual data that can be later interpreted and acted upon. The resulting (6X7mm frame) medium format films were printed out as numbered

¹¹ *Passages Of Time* commissioned by North East Pennine Arts.

contact sheets and can be seen as part of a growing linear narrative¹². Alberto Pérez-Gómez (in Ewing, 2009) points out that as knowledge grows these repeated encounters or field trips can also operate as site visits. The field trip is designed to gain knowledge of a place first hand (which can be touristic but also includes activities such as fieldwork) whereas a site visit involves 'travelling to *practice* situated within an external brief' (Gomez, 2009:25). My research remained open to the possibility of new chance discoveries but, as experience grew, I moved away from this starting position to one where the process became increasingly comparative, more in line with a site visit. In this situation one can draw on previous experience and observe change. Combined, the field trip/site visit can be seen as a potential site of framed experiential learning or praxis (Kolb, D. 1984).

The Oldham Road Project acts as an ongoing survey that includes both of these processes of field and site visit and as the project progressed the contact sheets acted as visual field notes that evidenced a collection of experiences.

2.1.2 Repeated Detail.

Henri Lefebvre noted that, 'I see humble events of everyday life as having two sides: a little individual chance event – and at the same time an infinitely complex social event, richer than many essences it contains within itself.'

(Lefebvre 2008a; 57 in Tormey: 220)

While making repeated visits to the area, I became aware of how increased attention to detail carried extended reading. For instance, methods adopted to decorate or refurbish buildings or the design of front gardens could indicate social status or shared cultural interests which could be individual and distinctive or make visual connections with similar situations observed throughout the area. I was aware that my visual reading of these details depended on my previous encounter and newly gained knowledge. The example below shows a terraced street in Failsworth with painted steps and

¹² The processed film having passed through the camera can encourage a linear reading which leads the viewer to consider what happens next similar to storytelling. Example contact sheets in Appendix 1.

wall toppers. Photographed in 1986 this feature appeared specific to this area and while the regimented terraced housing shared similar features the choice of colour allowed for household individuality to show through.



Charlie Meecham, 1984. *Painted Steps*.

As the project progressed and I became more familiar with the area I began to note repetition. This recognition suggested subjects that could now be marked up on the contact sheets and investigated using a plate camera through rephotography as part of a reflexive process (see Chapter Four below). I also noticed how changing appearances brought about by clearance and environmental improvement schemes, reconfigures the values of the remaining infrastructure. The process of removing the most run-down buildings on a street then reveals the next tier of run-down architecture. New sight lines appear and what might have been a closed and claustrophobic space, suddenly becomes bright and open.

Attention to detail grew with closer observation which Gros (2014) regards as a process which is enhanced by walking:

Just walking without rush, without any set purpose, makes the town look a little as it might have looked to one seeing it for the first time.

With no focus on anything particular, everything is offered in abundance: colours, details, shapes, aspects. (Gros, 2014:167)

While walking the streets during fieldwork, chance encounters with local residents provided useful information which has helped colour my view and understanding of place and its history through their knowledge and personal experience. From the position of being an outsider looking in, this helped give clues as to where to go next and what to look at. Through this process of extended enquiry, the Oldham Road Project was not attempting to be critical of change but was primarily concerned with place as 'seen' in a contemporary 'everyday' way.

The subject matter and an account of the observational processes are more fully described in Chapter Four and referenced with the example contact sheets in the appendix.

2.2 Rephotography (*First View*).

Rephotography is a photographic method of reflective practice which provides the opportunity to visually compare processes of change. The *First View* included rephotography at two stages and in different ways. In the first instance rephotography was used when revisiting places to gather data and keep track of changes using a medium format camera while walking the streets. The second more formal rephotography followed by returning to selected locations with a 5X4inch large format camera to make detailed constructed images. In this second phase of rephotography, the contact sheets containing the medium format visual field notes were used to select locations to be photographed on the later site visits using the large format plate camera. The medium format images on the contact sheets were marked up to indicate possible locations for further investigation using white dots. (These can be seen on edited sheets in Appendix 1). Some of these medium format images were later added to the large format photography in the *First View* exhibitions and are contained in the archive collection placed with Gallery Oldham.

Rephotography often involves detailed consideration with regard to camera position when one is attempting to make an accurate before and after comparison. The large format plate camera requires the use of a tripod which

encourages a more formal process of observation and attention to detail and consideration with regard to position. This can heighten an awareness of the relationship to subject as - fore, middle, and background adding to how an image is read. Height can also have an important effect in terms of visual description and encounter. For instance, an image taken from a high point can give a sense of descriptive overview and can appear formal and unambiguous, whereas a less formal handheld image taken on the street can carry a sense of chance encounter, similar to a sideways glance. A camera placed closer to the subject takes on forensic characteristics because of its capacity to record detail with no surrounding distractions.

The contact sheets containing the medium format visual field notes were used to select locations to be rephotographed on the later site visits using the large format camera.



Charlie Meecham, 1986. *Abandoned Estate 1*.

This is an example of a medium format photograph taken while on a fieldwork visit to this estate which I found abandoned prior to demolition.



Charlie Meecham, 1986. *Abandoned Estate 2*.

This *First View* photograph was made on a second visit using the large format plate camera.

2.3 Review period between *First* and *Second Views*.

The period between the *First* and *Second Views* provided an opportunity to reflect on the results of the first exhibition and consider strategies for how I might proceed. Additionally, I could draw on experience gained from showing the work in London at the Architectural Association (1987). This helped broaden my view with regard to how this project could be seen outside of the area and to consider regional variations that were to a greater or lesser extent similarly undergoing processes of change and redevelopment. While reviewing the medium format contact sheets from the *First View* I became aware of a sense of chance encounter that was absent in some of the more formal large format images. On reflection, I recognised the importance of this process in helping to provide an experiential sense of discovery and shared participation. I felt that the *Second View* could be made more approachable through appearing less formal and inviting broader and more personal interpretation from the

audience. This observation led me to consider the advantage of integrating images from both processes when finally editing work for the *Second View* including an increased variety of formats where appropriate as described in Chapter Four. This later helped me to consider how to structure the archive so as to help make it appear more open for broader interpretation.

2.4 Rephotography (*Second View*).

When I began the *Second View* (25 years on) I had to search out forgotten locations in a similar way to the *First View* by walking and photographing the streets and familiarising myself with the area. I then chose to visit and rephotograph some of the sites previously photographed with the large format camera. My intention was to investigate changes to these places that could be either dramatic or subtle. There were a few locations where it seemed appropriate to take the exact same photograph from the same position a technique adopted by Mark Klett *et al* in *Second View, The Rephotographic Survey Project* (1977-79) which revisited sites previously photographed by nineteenth century pioneer photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan (1840-1882) and William Henry Jackson (1843-1942). In comparing the before and after images, this analytical view allows comparison through seen differences. Klett *et al* wished to replicate the original images as accurately as possible by not only reproducing the same camera angle, but also by replicating the same time of day, time of year and weather conditions, thereby producing a working methodology (Klett in McLeod, 2012:178).

At times it was possible to witness similar processes of visual change happening along the Oldham Road by adopting similarly exact camera placement. For example, the image comparison below show maisonettes that have been removed since the *First View* leaving a gap while the gasometer and some more recent warehousing remain.



Oldham Road large format rephotography - 1986 & 2011

As this comparative example suggests, changing appearances brought about by clearance and environmental improvement schemes reconfigure the values of the remaining infrastructure. The process of removing the most run-down buildings on a street then reveals the next tier. New sight lines appear and what might have been a closed and claustrophobic space, becomes bright and open.

In the main, however, in the comparative (before and after) photographs taken for the Oldham Road, I chose to move the position of the camera slightly and so extend the view so that there was more of a sense of an unfolding story. In this regard my practice of rephotography in the *Second View* was distinct from that of Klett and also from more recent photographers such as John Davies.¹³ I found that approaching the same place but from a different direction and at different times of day could extend the experience of the place while maintaining a familiarity not dependent on a singular viewpoint. The images below show an example where the underpass is recognizable in both photographs but additional information is included in the second photograph by turning the camera more centrally to emphasize how the trees have grown to isolate the space and, as a consequence, a security camera has been added.

¹³ John Davies visited industrial sites that he had previously photographed in the North of England around Sheffield (2006).



Changed view, same location - 1986 & 2011

This extended knowledge helped to show the knock-on effect of structural changes in specific locations to the broader landscape and provided imagery that revealed incidental stages that would otherwise be forgotten.

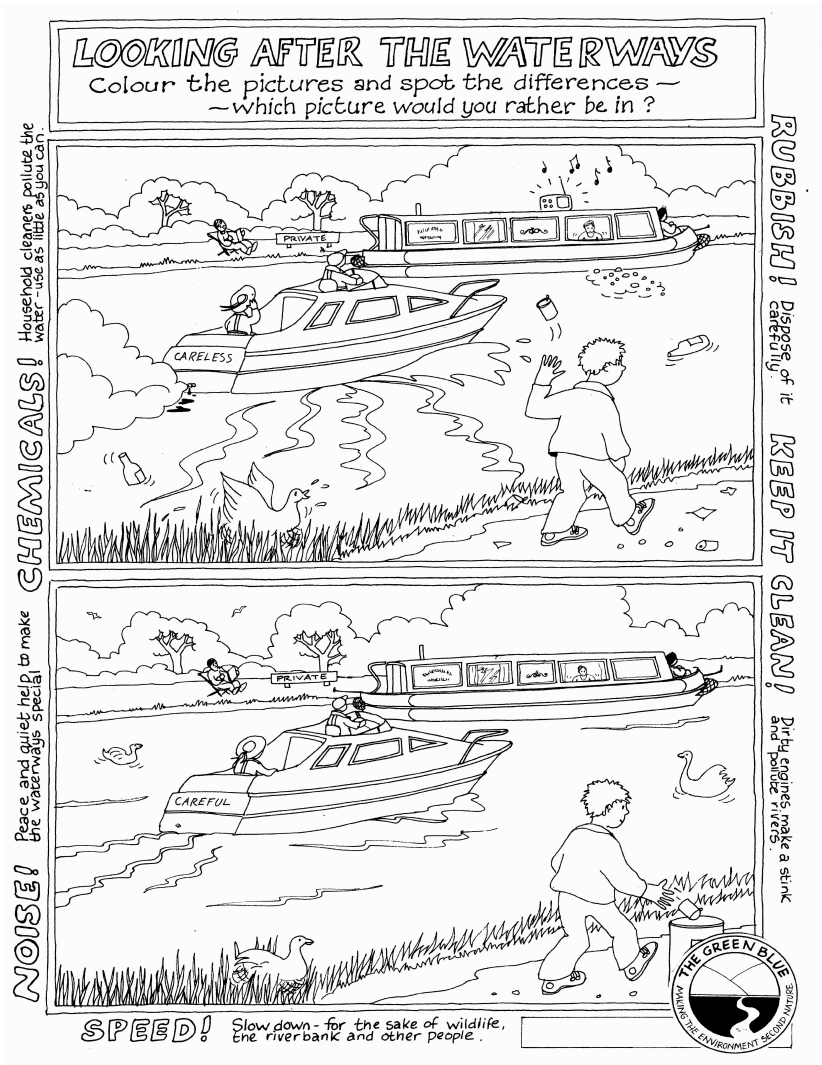
2.4.1 Comparative Detail, Engaging Audiences.

As suggested in the *First View*, I began to develop a dialogue with my perception of the ordinariness of the area. By this I mean I did not have specific places or iconic buildings in mind to photograph. To be able to do this I discovered that a certain amount of time had to pass before any photography was made and that I was acting out the role of participant observer. Baudelaire wrote about the *flâneur* as one who acted as ‘witness’ to life on the street, looking for ‘a meaningful yet transitory quality’ (Baudelaire, 1964:12). I would usually walk around the area for about half an hour before I was drawn to anything specific.

As the project progressed and moved to the *Second View*, and I witnessed the progressive clearance of the abandoned mills and Victorian infrastructure, I also began to question how this might be impacting on sense of place. The developing visual record became more complex including features not previously considered significant or seen in the *First View* and the process became increasingly comparative and open to dialogue. As will be seen in Chapter Four, in the *Second View* I also began to consider how best to present

the work so that it could be seen as approachable and have value in as broad a context as possible.

Traditionally found in children's comics, the observational game comparing similar images with changed details can heighten skills in visual observation.



© <http://www.the.greenblue.org.uk/>

This device continues to be used for educational projects such as the drawing for Green Blue that is designed to encourage better behavior on UK waterways. While this process of concentrated observation to search out difference is placed in the context of a game, the process can also in the case of photography improve or activate memories and past associations.¹⁴

¹⁴ A form of rephotography also exists in the traditional family album following the progress of family members through their lives including significant events such as births and marriages.

As already suggested, this process of 'compare and contrast' was important to the photographic and participatory methodologies developed in the *Second View*. In the intervening period between the two *Views*, I had also learnt from a *Cameras in Schools* project¹⁵ that photo elicitation can be seen to 'help encourage discussion, description, draw ideas from feelings, memories and associations' (Meecham, 2004). This case study investigated the potential for the use of digital cameras as a cross-curricular aid for teaching and learning in secondary education. The knowledge derived from it helped me consider how photographs could be used to help generate ideas for new (comparative) images during the *Second View* and how these photographs, in turn, could be used to engage audiences and provoke discussion. As visual sociologist Douglas Harper notes:

The difference between interviews using images and text, and interviews using words alone lies in the ways we respond to these two forms of symbolic representation. This has a physical basis: the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words. These may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information. (Harper, 2002:13)¹⁶

In his research, Harper found that to be useful in conversation, images do not have to be perfect. Images that have faults or that appear unclear can encourage additional conversation about what the photograph fails to show. This I found to be true with the schools project case study (2004). When reviewing images in the classroom, I found the students would often be more verbal and expressive with their failed images than the better framed imagery in that they felt free to add comment on what could not be seen. This ability to search out an image and compare difference both seen or unseen appears fundamental if you wish to encourage participation. As an integral part of the

¹⁵ Meecham, C. 2004. *Using Digital Cameras within Secondary Education: A Case Study*, University of Leeds School of Education.

¹⁶ Douglas Harper in *Visual Studies*, Volume 17(1), April 2002. In this study he was interested in the interrelationship of a farming community.

Second View I later organised a series of practical projects with local residents which explored this idea further, which I describe in Chapters Four and Five. In developing this participatory work, I was also aware that the perception of the value and purpose (as well as intended audience) can have a direct influence on how a photograph is read.

This has raised questions about truth and authenticity and at times can be seen as threatening and intrusive. Questions about who is in control and possible ambiguity regarding how these images are stored and used has had both a good and bad effect. The need for so many surveillance cameras in Britain has primarily been justified to act as a deterrent for purposes of security and provide evidence should malpractice take place. Within the public domain, the ease and speed with which photographs can be posted on social groups continues to have issues with privacy and intrusion. The converse and positive side is that there is now the opportunity for increased participation and this helped to broaden my view as to how the research would develop with the potential of making the photographs available on the internet which could then be responded to in new ways outside of the confines of the conventional archive or gallery.

As will be seen more fully later, rephotography also allows for visual interpretation that operates at the levels of both denotation and connotation. For instance, photographs of buildings being demolished could be interpreted as visual description through visual content (denotation) but could also prompt description of experiences and past activities not shown (connotation). Photographs of the fenced and grassed over gaps where buildings had once stood appeared to question what had been and what might follow. This form of comparison which I actively sought to elicit through the *Second View*, encourages the viewer to take ownership of the place as photographed. When out photographing on several occasions local residents would ask me what I was doing. They often assumed that I was employed by the council to survey sites prior to further demolition work being done. When they discovered my interest in following change they were often keen to tell me about their connections to that place. This supported my intention to develop an archival record of images that depicted settings and details that could act as memory

triggers to reawaken recalled moments from previous forms of engagement with place.

The individual images are not political in the sense of attempting to adapt, persuade, or change a collective mindset. The intention is to encourage reflection based on the viewers previous experience and expectations. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes, (1977:27) defines the *punctum* as ‘an entirely personal recognition, provoked by a singular experience of an apparently insignificant detail, which confronts each of us differently [acting to] supplement the more culturally recognisable signs in an image, which he names the *studium*’ (Tormey, 2013:37). In this regard, any image in the archive may provoke a sense of place as a personal and emotional response. This transparency might lead to an individual or group having a ‘claim’ to what cannot be seen in the recorded details contained in the image. The photographs are *open* to interpretation, ‘this importantly indicates that the production of meaning is dependent on locality and the cultural context in which it appears’ (Tormey, 2013:35). As discussed more fully in Chapter Four, while showing the photographs to local residents, I noted that significance of each photograph depended on individual interpretation based on gained experience related to those places. The images were being looked ‘through’, which encouraged associations to be made, past memories to resurface and a sense of history of place to emerge. Through this process diverse readings arose with regard to what is considered good and bad in landscape linked to memory. In other words this project used images of the local environment that represented both good and bad elements that could be individually defined as such but which could also act as triggers to past memories and associations which would otherwise remain hidden and lost.

2.5 Participation.

By the time I began the *Second View* (2006), recent development of digital technologies had changed expectations of what photography can say and how it would be viewed. ‘The nature and culture of photography [were becoming] increasingly unfixed’ (Bull, 2010:28). Recognition that social media could encourage participation had facilitated new ways of sharing and viewing images. The inclusion of cameras in mobile phones and the ease with which images

could be uploaded to social pages on the internet had brought image and text closer together than ever before. This new openness made it possible to talk about events as they happened to an increasingly participatory audience. I also began to consider how this might impact on photography projects that were archived within institutions and how they might now be viewed as fixed and historicised. Museums and galleries also recognised that they needed to find ways to make themselves visible in this new environment and had begun to digitise collections in the belief that this would help enhance visibility and find 'new audiences'.¹⁷ Also the *First View*, dominated by the politics of the 1980s, evidenced heightened activity and clearance of redundant infrastructure that by the start of the *Second View* had now slowed. These two factors encouraged me to consider applying a new approach to the photography for the *Second View*.

I felt that ideas about re-photography showing two moments of the then and now (comparative and separate) as isolated from a continuous field, could instead be seen as two markers *in* a continuous field. As will be seen, this led me to question if the Oldham Road photographs depicting place could be part of lived experience rather than more traditionally viewed in a historical context. Doreen Massey considers areas as being in constant flux:

This is space as a sphere post-industrial of dynamic simultaneity, constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be determined (and therefore always underdetermined) by the construction of new relations. It is always being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished. (Massey 2005:107)

The diversity of ideas and experiences brought to a place helps give it its individual identity which is constantly in flux and this allows for adaptive change. Also the relationship of space to place and place to space (sometimes referred to as gaps in this thesis) is evidenced in the photography of this area. I was interested to make photographs that could be used for interpretation, evidence and speculation¹⁸ (Rowe, 2011:341) that could be capable of providing photographic imagery showing continuing encounter and revaluation of place.

¹⁷ Arts Council England, *Grants for the Arts, Audience development and marketing sheet*, 2015.

¹⁸ Eric Margolis and Jeremy Rowe, 2011. Methodological Processes to Disclosing Historic Photographs in: Margolis, E. and Pauwels, L. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. London: Sage.

This resonates with a similar objective of the Mass Observation Archive which offers its services as an ongoing research tool combining both historic and contemporary social data through intersubjective observation.¹⁹

I was interested to see if my process of picture making could be of use in helping generate debate about what aspects of infrastructure has value as seen through residents', eyes. I wondered if this style of photography could act as an *aide-mémoire* and give value to incidental details that might be overlooked by outsiders such as architects and planners. I also thought that it would be interesting to use my work to trigger ideas that could be followed up by local residents through making their own photographs. To explore this further, I began editing images from the *First View* and examples of new work for the *Second View* to make into a presentation to be shown to local groups. I discovered a local housing association²⁰ was already sponsoring some local arts activities and this seemed like a good place to start. This led to the formation of a photography group in Newton Heath and also a project with the St George's youth group in Miles Platting. I also made contact with members of a local history group and a local walking group. I decided to concentrate on two approaches. Firstly, to use my photography to elicit debate, for instance, to talk about childhood memories of growing up in the area and what had changed. Secondly, to encourage residents to make their own photographs as a response to my images based on their own experience of the locale.

2.6 Conclusion.

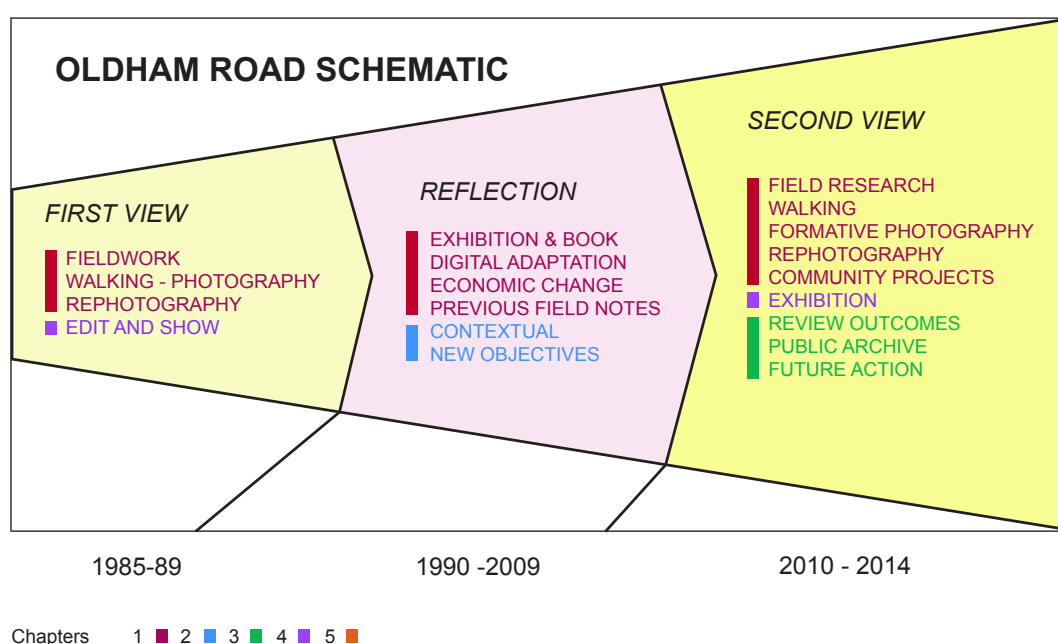
This chapter has described my developing approaches and discoveries while conducting rephotography of the Oldham Road. The process initially involved fieldwork including gathering visual data from repeated visits while walking the area over a number of years. A portable medium format film camera was used to act as visual notebook. Increased familiarity with the area and knowledge gained by chance encounters with local residents then led to a selection of specific locations being chosen from the initial findings as representative of trends. These locations were rephotographed with a large format camera for the *First View* Exhibition.

¹⁹ The Mass Observation Archive is a charitable trust in the care of Sussex University. Founded in 1937 by Charles Madge, a poet and social observer, Tom Harrison, Humphrey Jennings and Humphrey Spender who photographed 'Worktown' based on Bolton.

²⁰ New East Manchester.

There followed a break allowing time to review what had been discovered and to consider the wider social and economic issues affecting the UK and Europe at that time. Also the adoption of newer digital technologies and increased ways of communicating via the web had started to revalue how photographic practice was to be seen and interpreted.

The *Second View* was started twenty-five years on, beginning with fieldwork to refamiliarise and record physical changes to the area since the *First View*. Referencing the previous photography, the fieldwork revealed new subject matter which recontextualised the value of the previous photography (described in Chapter Four). This was later added to the previous photography and chosen locations were later rephotographed using the large format camera as before.



Enhanced by changing technologies and global markets, the local environment was physically adapting to changing living and working practices. This fragmentation led me to question if the pace of change was threatening to engulf personal attachments and values of place. The research was reflexive so the subject matter became extended as experiences grew and new processes were adopted with regard to positioning and view. Since the *First*

View, changing technologies were to influence how this work could be viewed and its use extended through increased participation. I went on to consider ways to make the work publicly available as an interactive archive. This will be further described in the following chapters.

3 – Contextual Review

3.1 Socio economics/politics of Oldham Road.

External preconceptions of locality or place tend to be based on historic notions about the area. When this project was first started in the 1980s the traditional Lancashire mill towns had been in decline since before the Second World War (Law, 1999:80). The skyline still had some mills but over capacity of manufacturing meant that the traditional social pattern of a mill town, which had roots in Victorian economic expansion, could no longer be supported. The urban/industrial landscape between Manchester and Oldham appeared to be gradually changing but without an integrated plan. In contrast, the landscape paintings by L.S. Lowry combined with media tropes such as the TV soap “Coronation Street” (ITV, formerly Granada TV) and later “Life On Mars” which was set in the 1970s (BBC 2006-7), were a reflection on how the area was generally perceived at the time, as fixed and stylised. In the same way as other working communities in industrial parts of the UK, the area centered along the Oldham Road retained a sense of community based on previous working patterns, collective memory and family histories.

I started to become aware of this road in 1980 through making occasional car journeys between Manchester and Oldham. With increased familiarisation I began to notice that a number of structural changes to the area were beginning to happen which included demolition and clearance. Emerging gaps between the buildings lining the road provided glimpses of areas behind that opened new, previously hidden vistas. I felt drawn to investigate what was happening in more detail. I decided to make a series of visits starting from different points, walking the area making chance decisions about exactly where I would go through what I encountered. On each visit I photographed details and settings that appeared characteristic of place and began by questioning what was to become of this mill town landscape as post-industrial blight was to be replaced by proposed improved housing and increasingly globalised commerce. As stated in the introduction to the *First View* book (*The Oldham Road*, published by the Architectural Association), by the mid 1980s ‘along the road itself there are now open areas of grass which separate the new housing from the traffic, to which the mills that remain have become very much a backdrop’ (Meecham,

1987:7). I was later to discover that 'industrial decline had begun decades before but had fallen into rapid decline in the 1960s as textile production spread to other parts of the world. The last mill closed in Oldham in 1998' (Byrne & Pasha, 2011). The area increasingly relies on service sector jobs in and around Manchester and self-employment continues to be vulnerable to economic fluctuations. Until recently, there has been a systemic lack of new initiatives and inward investment to combat this problem. 'Rates of income deprivation vary across Oldham, and there are areas as high as 60 per cent in one ward' (2010, Oldham Partnership's *Anti-poverty Strategy*).

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives: Experiencing and Visualising place.

While considering ways of understanding the city in the 1920s, Chapman and Ostwald describe how architect Le Corbusier used aerial photography to show organised space from above, adopting the 'god-like modernist perspective looking down for the purposes of shaping the future' (2009:40). This modern view also employed processes of mapping as a spatial representational system to help 'formulate schemes to shape historic cities in such a way that they could solve, both spatially and socially, the ills of the city' (2009:38).

The Surrealists chose an alternative view to Modernism by the combined processes of literature, photography (Eugène Atget), film and collage. This visualised a humanised street view through chance day-to-day encounter. These approaches helped them 'document the complex, temporal palimpsest of the city; recording not only the spaces but also the events that occurred in them and the time sequences that transformed them' (2009:38). This reference to time helps encourage a narrative that draws on past histories and questions what it is that we notice or respond to regarding place. Combined elements can trigger particular feelings and encourage fleeting memories, 'an individual's experience of a city is fragmentary' (2009:39).

Both modernist and Surrealist approaches influenced my thinking around 'visualising' place. More recently, theoretical speculations of Tilly also resonated.

Tilly has written about the relationship that early civilizations had to their landscape. In *Time Memory and Movement* (1994) he comments, 'human

activities become inscribed within a landscape such that every cliff, large tree, stream, swampy area becomes a familiar place. Daily passages through the landscape become biographic encounters for individuals, recalling traces of past activities and previous events and the reading of signs – a slit log here, a marker stone there’ (Tilley, 1994:14-17). Further to this, he notes how early observation of ‘rock outcrops would have served as important landmarks and orientation points, as they do today’ (Tilley, 1994:99).²¹ In and around Oldham, the mills seemed to stand out in a similar way. Each mill had its name high up to be seen from a distance either on the chimney or water tower. These buildings were to be seen but not entered unless for a legitimate reason connected to work.



Charlie Meecham, 1985. *Fencing*.

²¹ Tilley concludes, ‘They rather seem to have acted primarily as symbolic reference and ritually important ceremonial meeting-points on paths of movement, drawing attention to the relationship between local groups and landscape – itself already a constructed symbolic form of named places, pathways and significant locales from the Mesolithic onwards’ (Tilly, 1994:109).

Embarking on the Second View, I was also aware of Doreen Massey's (2005) argument that an internal sense of the local and of place does not produce a constructive community environment alone. People arrive from all over and this global collectiveness produces a more real and vibrant experience of place. The diversity of ideas and experiences brought to a place helps give it its individual identity which is constantly in flux and this allows for adaptive change. This is not to deny that there will also be residual histories including families that go back several generations, but these add to the forward-looking fabric and mix of people who are having to adapt to the current situation. Continued located experience is gained by being born and brought up in the area and through working locally.



Charlie Meecham, 1986. *New Build*.

As has been suggested, by the start of the *Second View*, I felt that the area had become a palimpsest, a place of layered history and fading memories where nothing was fixed and little was held as sacred and where anything could happen. There was no obvious visible center. Each new development stood separate from its neighbour as 'no(n)-stable configurations' (Koolhaas, 2009)

having their own function and rationale and remaining for as long as it made sense to then, in turn, be replaced. In this way abandonment and modern ruin does not last for long or might not but for various economic downturns which inevitably halt regional development.²² When this happened the new projects were put on hold, and cleared spaces remained empty, at best, grassed over and fenced. This stasis (which to a certain extent I learnt had always been there because of the volatile nature of speculative business) allowed time for general wear and tear to reveal material clues to past activity. Cobbled streets emerged from under worn tarmac and partially demolished terraced housing offered tantalising glimpses of their decorated interiors, ‘as part of a distributed geography of multiple absences’ (Edensor, 2012).

3.3 Theoretical Perspectives: Photographic Meanings.

The photographs in the Oldham Road Project were not intended as part of a family album or an estate agent’s window to be seen as properties for valuation and sale. Instead, the singularity of the buildings would often include personal features offering clues and suggesting the range of interests and personality of the occupants as well as signs of wider social and economic use including small business premises, schools and places of spiritual worship. Benjamin (1931) suggests, ‘Photography with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious through psychoanalysis. The process of recording what is there through the image reveals hidden detail’ (Benjamin, 1931:59). A photograph might also incorporate surrounding information to show contrasting or awkward juxtapositions as in the example below, which would be an inappropriate choice for the estate agent’s window. As Salvesen notes, ‘the intent is to control interpretation for the purpose of a sale based on an understanding of how people read pictures of houses and not how they read photographs as pictures’ (Salvesen 2013:82).

As the project progressed I became increasingly aware of how the photography showed this landscape haunted by traces of its relatively recent industrial past and abandoned places of social activity. As already noted, Barthes (1964) suggests that photographs carry meaning at the levels of both denotation and

²² Including the period of this research which shows the effects through the 70s, 80s and from 2008 when the UK first went into its most recent recession.

connotation. They overlap and cohabit the space of reading and interpretation. Denotation refers to the instantly recognisable content of an image.



Charlie Meecham, 2010. *Front Garden*.

In the case of the Oldham Road this could include objects such as corner buildings. Connotation on the other hand could indicate these settings as recognisable meeting places and as already suggested this level of connotation becomes increasingly important in the *Second View* research process. The photograph (such as the photograph of the abandoned playhouse in the *First View*, now demolished in the *Second View*) can contain details representative of moments that carry multiple meanings having associations with experiences related to the time they were made. When I came to exhibit the work this process became increasingly evident.



Charlie Meecham, 1986. *Playhouse.*



Charlie Meecham, 2011. *Rephotography - Demolished Playhouse.*

While showing example photographs to a group of older residents, I noted that they used the photography to remember past events that would otherwise remain forgotten. Younger people had a more forward thinking present day approach. They felt more challenged to recognise existing locations and to consider their ongoing experiences in those places.

3.4 Photographic Histories and Precedents.

Before beginning the *First View*, I was aware of the high contrast black and white photographs by Bill Brandt taken in Halifax (1937) and also the paintings of Salford and the surrounding area by L.S. Lowry. These evocative images, very much of their time, depicted what I felt had become an embedded stereotypical and outmoded view of the industrial North of England. Alongside my practice, I also researched other images and photographic processes that might act as an influence and guide with regard to subject matter and approach.

Walker Evans (1903-1975) recorded the appearance of the street including architecture, shop fronts, signage and advertising in his storybooks about American cities such as Pittsburgh, Toledo and Detroit. He was influenced by the work of Eugène Atget (1857-1927) who liked to refer to his photographs as records, an example of pure straight photography and not artistic interpretations.²³ This became a model for later photographers in America (Tormey, 2013:50). In October 1935 Evans joined the staff of the Resettlement Administration, Department of Agriculture, Washington DC, under the direction of Roy Stryker. His job specifies acting as photographer, 'to carry out special assignments in the field; collect, compile and create photographic material to illustrate factual and interpretive news releases and other informational material upon all problems, progress and activities of the Resettlement Administration'.²⁴ (2013:113). The photography was to act as a record of what was out there, what was happening, how were people coping with the Depression, drought and homelessness. These pictures were to be *used* for news purposes, to help in political persuasion. They later formed an archive now housed in The Library of Congress in Washington. While documenting the 1930s American

²³ Atget photographed the old streets of Paris prior to them being demolished to make way for Haussmann's modernisation program which began in 1853. The photographs include details including shop windows and hidden courtyards.

²⁴ Letter to Miss McKinney, Division of Information, Room 221. October 9, 1935.

Depression, Stryker advised that his approach was not to get too emotional but to be 'puritanically economical, precisely measured, frontal, unemotional, dryly textured [and] insistently factual' (Szarkowski, 1973:116). In another note to Evans, Stryker requests pictures that show decay and abandonment:

One of our southerners tells us that this is a very rich territory for the following things – old estates, decay, erosion and bad mill towns...in general put quite a bit of effort into showing the erosion, sub marginal areas, cut-over land. (Letter from Stryker to Evans, 12/1936 – 1/1937, Tormey, 2013:118)



Walker Evans, 1936. *Negro House, Tupelo, Mississippi*. © Library of Congress.

In 1975 an exhibition curated by William Jenkins under the collective title of *New Topographics*²⁵ opened in George Eastman House which included photography by Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal and Stephen Shore. Unlike the previous work by established photographers such as William Henry

²⁵ A later edited version became a touring exhibition which was shown at the Arnolfini in Bristol in 1981.

Jackson, Alfred Stieglitz, Minor White and Ansel Adams, who made images which acted as metaphor, expressing a personal and emotional response to landscape, this group wished to make pictures that were free of emotion and more as a stark record. For example, one of Baltz's projects investigates the redevelopment of *Park City*. This town had been founded in the 1860s on the discovery of local silver deposits. After the boom years the town went into decline but has since been revived as a ski resort.



Lewis Baltz, 1978-9 *Prospector Park, Subdivision Phase III, Lot 160, Looking West*.

Also of significance to me was the way in which Baltz's project was broken into sequences to show different aspects of processes happening in this developing town. Subjects include clearance and rubble, boundaries to new construction projects with the surrounding mountains in the background. He stated, "I want my work to be neutral and free from aesthetic or ideological posturing" (Baltz in Di Grappa, 1980:23). His work appears stark and without emotion supported by the titling of the images suggesting that the photographs are designed to be viewed as survey material, showing the construction process as it happens. Such images do appear to stand as 'objective' facts letting the viewer respond in their own way to the information provided. None the less, Baltz has made a judgement regarding what is or is not included in the frame and it is hard to view the work as not having an 'attitude' with this method that often recorded gritty details in harsh light.

This process of trying to make a contemporary record of an urban fringe setting attracted me. Along with photography, I had formerly read interviews by Studs Terkel (1975) of American working people and had previously attempted a similar set of interviews with a farming community close to the centre of Manchester(1972).²⁶ I was particularly drawn to the attention to detail given to people who would not normally be given a voice and felt that my photography could do likewise about a place. Although the *New Topographics* approach sought to make an accurate record, most of the imagery lacked the human touch so evident in both Atget's and Evans's work and in fact appeared to do quite the opposite. When the exhibition was reviewed this detachment did attract criticism as 'throughout the critical allegations of coolness, distance, banality and even anti-photography, a problem emerged in reading or retrieving the work of these photographers' (Highman,1981:3). Whilst the *New Topographic* style was important to me regarding style and subject matter, the black and white photography felt harsh and resistant. In contrast, my engagement with the *Oldham Road* sought to reflect a human and participatory engagement with place.

Since 1973 I had mainly photographed using colour film because I felt this made photography look more contemporary and less stylised. Most of the photography I had seen whilst studying photography at Manchester Polytechnic (1971-74) had been in black and white and photographs of the North of England were no exception.²⁷ I felt that this process could further enhance the relatively new practice of social landscape photography in Britain at that time. Colour photography offered a form of photographic representation that departed from the orthodoxy of pictorialism and romanticism. This coincided with the colour photography in America championed in Sally Eauclaire's books *New Color Photography* (1981) and *American Independents* (1986). These books showcased the work of William Eggleston, Helen Levitt, Joel Meyerowitz, Stephen Shore, Joel Sternfeld, Jack D. Teemer and others. Their work appeared fresh and new and gave off a feeling of the 'here and now' which I had sought through my work.

²⁶ I made two handmade copies of this book titled *Twelve Farms* in 1972 which contains photographs, maps and interviews.

²⁷ For instance the high contrast black & white photography of Halifax (1937) by Bill Brandt.

At this time the large format work of Stephen Shore particularly stood out for me because his detailed view of the street became more clearly described through the use of colour. The elements contained in his pictures created a narrative that had resonance with Evans's work but which felt much more contemporary. For instance his photographs showing competing advertising signage that relied on bright colour combinations were new and unexpected in a gallery context. Dyer (2005) commented:

Shore shows what America looks like now. It is impossible to imagine a time when *this* will look like the past, partly because what it incarnates and enables is an *instant* civilisation (fast food, self service) predicated entirely on speed of transaction and immediate gratification.... Shore shows a world where there is nothing but the moment. (Dyer, 2005: 201)

Other photographic strategies that interested me included the work of Ed Ruscha with particular reference to *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) a two and a half mile stretch of Hollywood Boulevard photographed using a motorised camera as seen from a passing car. *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* was published as a continuous fold-out book. The separate photographs joined to make a continuous image following the architecture alongside the road. The project anticipates Google Street View in that it records what is there without any editorial interventions and can give a sense of travel along a stretch of road while allowing time to stop and look. He had previously grouped subjects in publications such as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) and *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965). The photographs selected for the book *Twentysix Gasoline stations* were edited down from about sixty images. He removed images he felt 'too interesting'. Describing the process of presenting his work he says:

I have eliminated all text from my books - I want absolutely neutral material. My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter. They are simply a collection of 'facts', my book is more like a collection of readymades.... (Ruscha, 2002).

His photographs have a snapshot quality and were taken while on journeys. In *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, there are no people on the street but each

building has architectural details that add character to the location which might otherwise be judged as dull and featureless. The photographs represent a glance or part memory of place. This work extended my appreciation of potential subject matter for my own project as it did other approaches to the American vernacular, through film (Wim Wenders *Paris Texas* 1984) literature (Jack Kerouac 1957 *On the Road*) and photography monographs (Robert Frank *The Americans* 1958). I was also aware of the photography of European photographers such as John Gossage, Luigi Ghirri, Michael Schmidt and Thomas Struth, whose work I found particularly insightful. For instance, in the 1970s Thomas Struth began to use a systematic process of photographing the Düsseldorf streets by placing his camera to look down the centre of the street at eye level.

The photographs below were taken by Struth early in the morning when there was little happening on the street.



Thomas Struth, 1979. Düsseldorfstrasse, Düsseldorf.

Thomas Struth, 1991. Hemannsgarten, Weissenfels 1.

In a catalogue for his retrospective tour 2010-12 he comments:

If you change the composition, then you are inviting people to consider the difference in the composition each time. If you have more of a scientific grid, more of a comparative structure, then this enables the visual structure to be understood more clearly.²⁸

(Lingwood and Bezola, 2010)

²⁸ Available at: <http://www.thomasstruth32.com/smallsize/photographs/duesseldorf/index.html>) [2015]

Asked why the lack of people in the photographs, he explains the necessity for long exposures when working with a large format camera and the need to stop down the lens to achieve depth of focus, 'also to express what you see that has been created by people – as people in a condensed form'. (Radio Interview for *Talking Germany* 02.11.2012)

This approach to photography might be thought of as dry and emotionless observation that fitted alongside the system-based and comparative photography of his Düsseldorf teachers, Bernd and Hilla Becher. As Mark Durden comments:

There is a historical and specific photographic framework for this early work – caught up in an archival and taxonomic documentary style. Mostly empty or with the minimum distraction from people, they bear certain affinities with Eugène Atget's early-20th-century Parisian street views. Struth's photographs carry information about the ideals and realities of urban space and city planning, bearing an accumulation of traces of history and social use.' (Durden, 2011).

In an interview with Struth, critic Shaun O'Hagan states:

Struth's photographs of Düsseldorf's streets and buildings, where the old and austere meets the modern and faceless, suggest, he says "a kind of embedded history of German power and identity that, in the long years of post-war silence, was not acknowledged either by those in power or by ordinary German citizens. For me, initially, the question was: how do you live with history? Then I began to ask: how is history embedded in the architecture of a city? How does a community represent itself in its architecture, truthfully or otherwise?" (O'Hagan, 2011).

This statement resonates with my experience photographing buildings along the Oldham Road. As I began researching the area prior to beginning the *Second View*, I became increasingly aware of the marks and alterations and clearances that represented individual and collective ongoing human activity. I felt the *Second View* could show the collision between the two time frames of past and

present as an evolving process.



Thomas Struth, 1991. *Ferdinand-von-Schill-Strasse*, Dessau.

Struth's photograph of Ferdinand-Von-Schill-Strasse is deserted. The parked cars suggest that the inhabitants have not yet got up and there is nothing happening in the dull morning light. I find myself drawn to this image. It demands quiet contemplation and feels like an empty stage just prior to the play beginning.

The photographs of Michael Schmidt work in a similar way. In his book *Berlin Nach 45* (2005), the photographs survey Südliche Friedrichstadt in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, previously divided by the Berlin Wall including bombed areas never rebuilt since WW2. Though most of the wall has now gone, the area remains a wasteland waiting for a developer to fill the gaps. There appears to be little happening, no billboards are evident suggesting postponed development and those buildings that do exist stand awkwardly apart from each other.²⁹ Photographed mainly in flat light, the pictures are again devoid of people. The photographs 'convey a threatening sense of silence, in which the sounds of battle still echo' (Frecot, 2005:20). The series of photographs in his book, *Berlin Nach 45*, show how Schmidt returns to the same places at different times to further investigate what is happening or perhaps more correctly not happening. In such a situation, even the parked

²⁹ New housing now fills most of these spaces which have helped revive the area since the International Building Exhibition 1979-89.

cars and rubbish become interesting details. Because of this, the pictures are not easy to read but could be understood to stand as testament to recent history that can only be imagined, 'a cool silver-gray "text" about the absence of people on an historical burial ground' (Frecot, 2005:22).

John Gossage has traced the route of the wall through Berlin in his publication *Berlin in the Time of the Wall* (2004). In his case there is a sense of exploration and journey that runs through his sequenced pictures. Often his photographs show the path ahead to suggest his passing through the space. In places these routeways appear hidden or blocked and are not official but have become desire paths. Unlike Schmidt's carefully composed large format work, these images create a sense of secrecy and tension where the camera is used with caution and 'on the hoof' so as not to be seen. Again there is only passing reference to human activity. He has since published *Putting Back The Wall*, (2007) which continues where he left off. The imagery is perhaps even more reflective with details and fragments acting as visual clues to vanished but not forgotten experiences. In the introduction to *Berlin in the Time of the Wall*, Gerry Badger describes Gossage's process as:

... a concentration upon the 'man altered' landscape, a predilection for what most would regard as 'non places', and importantly an apparently objective tone in the work, a coolness and transparency that deliberately opposed the subjective romanticism of traditional American landscape photography. (Badger, 2004)

Finally I wish to reference the work of Luigi Ghirri who's personal vision includes warmth and humour portrayed in the everyday, drawing on aspects of the surreal. His photography carries a sense that for a brief moment disconnected elements within the frame have become momentarily aligned. For instance, a number of his photographs include fragments from posters and advertising that often bring irony to the place where it is displayed. His photography can also demonstrate how incidental details can trigger associations with half-forgotten memories often extending meaning by adding a fluid almost dream-like quality to incidental description.

Reviewing Ghirri's work Ceramiche Marazzi notes that:

Through mirroring of positive and negative, projected and recorded, real and reflected, his photography creates a 'non place,' establishes a duplicity between void and solid, here and elsewhere.

(Marazzi, 1983:19)



Luigi Ghirri, 1985-6. *Fidenza*.³⁰

His photograph of a girl standing by a closed shop on a street corner in Fidenza represents an example image when nothing is really happening and time is suspended. Because of this, the location appears strangely significant as if we should have some prior knowledge of this place. Some of the *Oldham Road* imagery records similar moments where I sense an atmosphere expressing processes of time that go beyond the transparency of the moment. Also similar to Ghirri's fragmentary poster images, the *Oldham Road* photography includes

³⁰ from *Il profile della nuvole*, p.64.

examples where advertising posters create an ironic and awkward contrast to the surrounding location detail.



Charlie Meecham, 1987. *Billboard facing the Oldham Road and fronting demolition.*

This advertising hoarding for the Today newspaper, for instance, suggests that because the newspaper uses offset print technology, readers' hands are left clean as opposed to ink transfer through the standard slow dry linotype process. In the photograph there is an ironic connection between the dirty hands and the surrounding piles of dirt and rubbish which poses the question which is really of most serious concern? I thought that this comment paralleled a level of decay and decline in Britain at that time that was being overlooked.

3.4.1 Rephotographies

During the *First View* selected locations were revisited a number of times and finally rephotographed with a large format camera to formalise structure and detail. These photographs acted as a starting referent when the *Second View* commenced in helping to find forgotten locations and then used to map positions for the repeat photography.

By the time I began the Second View I had become aware of a number of rephotography projects which helped me to further consider how this project was operating. In science, rephotography continues to be used to record processes of change through accurately managed timed sequences. Slow motion capture has often been used to show cell change in biology or popularly, seasonal change in natural history programmes. An example of social rephotography is Nicholas Nixon's portrait project of the Brown Sisters begun in 1975 which is a repeated group portrait made every year.³¹ One could argue that this is an extension of how the traditional family album functions in keeping a record of the progress of the lives of a family with the photographs recording specific events in the calendar but also showing additions to the family and processes of aging over time.

There have also been rephotography projects which have revisited previously photographed sites in an attempt to show what has since happened through subsequent landscaping and redevelopment projects. Sometimes photographers have attempted to retrace the steps of previous famous photographers such as Daniel Quesney who revisited the parks and gardens of Versailles (Quesney, *Miroirs* 2012) originally photographed by Eugène Atget (1857-1927). Before and after comparison of the photographs shows examples where there has been little change while others evidence meticulous restoration.³² Most significant was *The Rephotographic Survey Project* conducted by Mark Klett *et al*, (1970). More recently, John Davies visited industrial sites that he had previously photographed in the North of England around Sheffield (2006). His photographs record loss and, in particular, the demise of heavy industry and manufacturing that are synonymous with the North. A lot of the previous infrastructure has been cleared which sometimes leaves uncomfortable gaps in his compositions. In a way we all use photography to review the past or make images that act as record. As mentioned in chapter 2.3, the *Oldham Road* project uses rephotography in a number of ways as a reflective process.

³¹ <http://acidcow.com/pics/19873-the-brown-sisters-project-35-pics.html>

³² Also Christopher Rauschenberg rephotographed details of the remaining infrastructure previously photographed by Atget in Paris published in his book *Paris Changing*, 2007.

3.4.2 Urban Fringes/Urban Change and Deindustrialisation.

Photography used as evidence has often raised questions around truth and authenticity and no more so than when used in areas of research. (Bull, 2010, and Prosser, 1998). The *Oldham Road* pictures are no different. Early photographic projects in and around Manchester and Salford reflected concerns for the poor housing and sanitation provided for the working classes.

Contributing to the Manchester Photographic Society surveys recording buildings prior to demolition around 1900, Sam Coulthurst made photographs that depicted life on the street and evidenced the run-down conditions and overcrowding in some of the back alleys. Examples of the worst photographs taken at that time have gone missing or were destroyed. Similar work by Thomas Annan in Glasgow was used as evidence to drive political change. As Tagg and Secula suggest, this visual evidence should be read as a 'mechanism for reading 'texts' but cannot be taken as truth because of the unreliable time based context and readings through social and structural semiotics (Margolis and Row, 2011:352). Some of these photographs clearly appear posed or set up. None the less the intention was based on visual observation which could be treated as 'real'.

With the *Oldham Road Project*, although no physical interventions were made regarding the arrangement of content, the decisions as to what would or would not be included in the 'frame' were dependent on my response to what I found on my visits. The sense of history and the observed changes in the edited photography is subjective. The *Oldham Road Project* was designed to act as a commentary that could be used as a departure point for further discourse and not to be seen as fixed or carrying a single message.

In his essay *The Remembrance of Nostalgias Lost and Future Ruins*, Mike Crang questions, 'how might photographs speak to the conflicted times of a landscape labeled post-industrial or de-industrialised? And how might such photography speak to the conditions of Northern England? Here it seems we are looking at a time and a place caught "in-between"' (Crang. 2012:61). These words are in the book that accompanies the work of John Kippin and Chris Wainwright whose exhibition reviews the effects of globalisation and subsequent impact on the post-industrial landscape of the North East. The

photographs consider the legacy of deindustrialisation, including decline in traditional mineral extraction and heavy manufacture such as shipbuilding that filters down to the residual. The new landscape shows another form of scarring, not produced by conflict (as in Struth's pictures of Berlin) but through industrial clearance and re-landscaping. Topographic details act as clues to what has gone before adding to the photographs and accounts housed in local archives and family albums. John Kippin's photographs, *Car Park Police* (1992), *American Coal* (2011), and *Harbour View* (2012), depict the move from manufacturing to consumerism, clearance and new housing developments along the abandoned waterfronts. This has become a globalised process producing a neo-liberal landscape that has been applied to other post-industrial sites in areas across the UK as through Europe and America. This area had suffered from creeping industrial decline for some time, tempered by occasional spurts of manufacturing activity for military purposes or in support of a political agenda that sought to maintain some shipbuilding activity (BBC *Shipbuilding on the Tyne* 2014). J.B. Priestley commented in his *English Journey* (1934):

As the various industries of Gateshead are in a state of rapid decline, it is possible that very soon it will be in a position of the decayed medieval towns, those ports that the sea has left, but unlike those medieval towns, it will not, I think be often visited by tourists in search of the quaint and the picturesque. (J.B. Priestley in Crang 2012:68)

He could not have foreseen the changes that have followed since the cultural regeneration process begun the 1980s which combines elements of the old infrastructure such as the converted Baltic granary (2002) with new signature buildings such as the Sage (2004) in Gateshead. The Oldham Road, in part because of its position between places, bordering both Manchester and Oldham has no cohesive identity. So while it suffered from all the problems associated with post-industrial decline, no plan was proposed or new monies found for an integrated redevelopment of the area. Instead, the redevelopment projects that are happening tend to further fragment the remaining infrastructure which has the effect of increased isolation between sections of the community.

3.5 Contextual Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed examples of photography that influenced my own approach to photographing the Oldham Road regarding subject matter and photographic strategies which visualise an extended process of change in particular contexts. The black and white example photography by Baltz, Struth and Schmidt suggest a cool, unemotional process of detailed observation that was at times appropriate to my own work. As noted at the time of my *First View*, the serious nature and documentary value of the black and white image was being questioned through new approaches to colour. My own work at this time was an important contribution to serious, critically engaged practice that explored the potential of using colour. I felt working in colour seemed more contemporary, less stylised and potentially more engaging. In so doing I aimed to balance the detached approaches of the New Topographics generation with a more subjective, humanistic and 'coloured' view such as the street photography by Shore and Ghirri. This use of colour was developed in my own work through combining both objectifying and apparently more subjective approaches. On the one hand my systematic revisiting of place over time is countered with an openness to chance encounter and subjectivity of vision. The surreal view of Ghirri discussed here is an appropriate example that influenced me. By incorporating everyday items such as billboard advertising, his work also gives clues to wider forces impacting from outside.

As described, the *Oldham Road Rephotography Project* has been conducted over a sustained period in a post-industrial and run-down suburb of Manchester not normally seen but passed through. The *Second View* makes sense only through the lens of the *First View*, in that, for me, the photography was a new exploration of a once familiar place. The before and after experience is one that takes place over twenty-five years and within lived memory. In this sense it is different from other rephotography projects in which the memory is more historic. This lived observation, in turn, makes possible the participatory opportunities which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The contextual analysis in this chapter has also considered some of the political and social change that impacted on this post-industrial area. I have also drawn on theoretical perspectives concerning the challenges of how to visualise a

process of gradual change. As noted I have been observing and recording a place that is normally only represented by media stereotypes or not seen at all. In so doing, I have created a unique visual document that records example stages of abandonment, clearance and renewal which would otherwise be unrecorded.

In the conclusion I will consider how this material can help us to understand how the residents can draw on this material to remember and understand the changes brought on by outside forces of globalisation, financial and social change. The next chapter will describe and evaluate the *Oldham Road Rephotography* project itself.

4 - Case Studies: First and Second Views

REFERENCING THE IMAGES: This chapter directly refers to the visual material placed in the Appendix. The named folders relate to specific stages of the practice and contain numbered pages that relate to the text below. This material relates to the original exhibition material (*from the First and Second Views*) housed with Gallery Oldham and this research will be added together with digitised text and photography for the web.

Appendix 1: *First View* edited medium format contact sheets (C1 – C203)

Appendix 2: *First View* large format photographs (Photo 1 – Photo 25)

Appendix 3: *First View* exhibition medium format example images.

Appendix 4: *First View* Text written by Ian Jeffrey (1987) for the book published by the Architectural Association, London.

Appendix 5: *Second View* edited medium format contact sheets (C2.1 – C2.126)

Appendix 6: Examples of collaborative photography made by the St. George's youth group.

Appendix 7: *Second View* combined exhibition edit (Individual numbered Images 1.2 on).

Appendix 8: Examples of reviews and related publicity.

Appendix 9: Original printed card for *Second View* exhibition (2013) with text by Steve Hanson.

Appendix 10: *Second View* 5X4 rephotography example comparisons.

4.1 A description of research material and selected content for the *First View* exhibitions and publication.

As already noted, the Oldham Road Project *First View* began in the winter of 1984. The area that I wished to survey centred along a nine mile stretch of the A62 running between Manchester and Oldham. I decided to make a series of visits and, as a familiarisation process, walk sections in an unspecified way responding to what I found and where I could access. When I began this project, I had an open mind as to what discoveries I might make and was interested in the process of gathering information to form a primary stage database of contact sheets. I chose not to catalogue each photograph from the

point of view of position, direction and time as I was interested in developing an inclusive experiential sense of place that would later be responded to in more detail by future visits.

A number of the early photographs include details of the residual Victorian red brick housing stock some of which had become dilapidated (Photo C11). The pictures taken while following desire paths and along alleyways lead around and behind the terraced streets and alongside abandoned mills. As I became more familiar with the area I became aware of the variety of architectural styles adopted for social housing built since the 1950s. The Victorian regimented housing plan had been replaced by groupings of buildings (Photo C13) and tower blocks that had little or no visual similarities to each other and this made me question if it was still possible to show this area as maintaining a distinct appearance linked to its industrial past. Was I witnessing the gradual disappearance of the body and skyline of a Lancashire mill town and its social context? (Photo C12). Effects of the downturn in the economy at that time (early 1980s) coupled with disruption caused by the miners strike and an acceptance of a future society becoming dependent on a service economy, appeared to have small regard for family or community (Photo C16)³³. From my perspective, the area appeared vulnerable to the changes brought on from effects of hastened industrial decline and the politicised desire to clear away the past.

The infrastructure in some run-down areas was being improved, such as in Collyhurst where pedestrianisation allowed for expanses of paving interspersed with walled or fenced areas of planting. Also, post-industrial quarried wastelands such as Moston Brook were undergoing major re-landscaping including installing new pathways and tree planting (C19, C23, C24). Some of these areas appear vast (C206) with housing and mills sitting on the skyline in the distance. In the mid 1980s Greater Manchester billboards placed alongside nearby roads, displayed the slogan 'We're bringing the countryside to your doorstep' (Photo C205).

Smaller family shops (C97) found themselves increasingly in competition with encroaching supermarkets and finding it hard to survive. Some appeared very

³³ Although this estate is relatively new, low rise and landscaped, I found examples of social stress indicated here by the boarded up house.

run-down (C37 C98). Stretches of buildings along the Oldham Road appeared like a facade hiding areas of clearance and alongside the shops, space created by demolition was often occupied by billboards. These could appear ironic in relation to the locations where they were placed (C30, C57, C78).

The photographs, acting as field notes as described in Chapter Two, often include examples of the remaining red brick cotton mills and their tall chimneys that appear as a backdrop to the area which was a theme returned to through the process of rephotography in both the *First* and *Second Views* (Contact sheets C49, C51, C52, C68). Often the mills display a name high up on the water tower or chimney that can be seen from a distance which further sets them out as landmarks and points of orientation (C54, C96). At this time a number of mills were being demolished that had become abandoned and dangerous (Photos C61, C64). Others had become storage units or were being divided up and repurposed for smaller businesses (C75) and loft apartments. These buildings were found hard to convert for modern industrial practice which increasingly favoured the single story warehouse plan. There were exceptions. Ferranti, for example, still used a converted mill as did Pifco, and Morrisons supermarket was operating from the ground floor of a mill opposite the Broadway (A663) road junction. Some new industrial development had moved in such as Sharp Electronics and L'Oréal Golden Ltd (C105, C87-88, C203). The shed-like construction of these enterprises, while appearing new and modern, did not have an appearance of permanence.³⁴

One of the more enduring historic architectural features lining the road were the public houses such as the White Swan in Hollinwood (C59) and The Cloggers in Failsworth. These buildings appeared increasingly isolated as the surrounding infrastructure was removed. The pressure of traffic on the road also made some housing appear too close (C106, C219) and some clearance work was done to distance housing from noise and pollution (C104). Clearance areas were often marked out with boundary posts (C204).³⁵

Hollinwood was home to the Roxy Cinema, the last remaining operating cinema on the road (C59, C220). There were additional closed and abandoned

³⁴ By the *Second View* Sharp had moved out and the buildings were being converted into an industrial park and L'Oréal a housing estate.

³⁵ By the *Second View*, these areas were increasingly fenced.

cinemas and theatres such as the Empress and the Playhouse at points along the road which appeared to act as markers between Oldham and Manchester.

As the *First View* progressed, I found further examples of failed housing chosen for demolition (C70, C80, C85-86, C88). Architects and planners had become aware that these post-war housing systems were not ideal for the families housed in them.³⁶ They recognised a need to return to more traditional housing patterns that produced a better environment such as defensible space and less noise (C99).

4.2 A review of the *First View* large format rephotography.

Appendix 2

The medium format photography, described above, acted as the research material from which to select and revisit themes. This process involved the use of a large format 5X4inch view camera bringing a more formal and constructed element to the project. The camera, often traditionally used for landscape and architectural photography, has the ability to correct converging verticals and precisely frame the image so that distortion is minimised. Additionally the large format images have the capacity to add detail and context to the various themes identified from the earlier research and I came to understand this process was a form of rephotography. I viewed the medium format 'street view' photography as a palimpsest for the new work that would further investigate and confirm what had previously been discovered. For instance, as the project progressed, I became increasingly aware of the ongoing structural changes beyond the road and decided that it would be appropriate to include the process of redevelopment that was impacting on the surrounding area. Photos 1 and 2 (Appendix 2) show a flat, borderland landscape being developed into an area for residential housing. In the background, abandoned mills are being demolished while in the foreground a new housing estate has recently been completed though the gardens are not yet established. Photo 3 looks across the Oldham Road towards that area but, in this case, the mills are in the foreground and still in use but not for their original purpose. I chose to include the shadowed foreground to contrast the distant landscape glimpsed between

³⁶ English Heritage www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/file/he/content/upload/9526.doc

the mill buildings. Photo 4 shows a similar viewpoint above the road showing a play structure in the foreground and a recently built Crown paint center. Photo 5 shows another construction site. In this case Elk Mill stands in stark contrast to the pantiled roofs and window designs of new housing that made no attempt to connect with any existing styles of regional architecture. The houses gave an impression of rootlessness by the implied nonexistent foundations and instead appeared to be floating on the topsoil.³⁷

Photo 6 shows a mill in the stages of demolition. Part of the mill, still standing, shows stone detailing added to the tower. This classical, even manorial, feature suggests a desire to communicate a sense of commitment and pride, perhaps reflecting on the quality of manufactured goods and subsequent longevity and standing of the business.³⁸ Attention to detail was also incorporated into the brick patterns that helped give the buildings an individual sense of design and character. This can be seen in Marlborough Mill (Photo 7) then recently repurposed for use as a Morrisons supermarket. I felt this was in stark contrast to the pared down 'non place' design of more recent shed-like industrial developments.

I continued to photograph notable buildings that had become disused along the road. Photo 8 shows a sooty black, boarded up church with a tree growing out of the tower and the Playhouse (Photo 9) had become a timber yard. Smaller business properties were also becoming increasingly vulnerable as with the paint shop (Photo 10) at the Manchester end of the road. Photo 11 shows a single house, still occupied but poorly maintained, alongside an end terrace that has been recently cleaned and painted. Photo 12 looks at the different ways of fencing property while retaining rights of way through different property boundaries and Photo 13 continues this theme showing planting and a diagonal path running between tower blocks on an estate. Photo 14 shows the close proximity of two shadowed maisonette housing units built close to a gasometer. Photos 15 and 16 exemplify the wear and tear of some of the social housing and infrastructure at that time. There were attempts being made to repair some aspects and Photo 17 shows new roofing to help make these buildings warmer

³⁷ This photograph has similarities to Robert Adams, *Tract House, Denver Colorado*, 1973.

³⁸ This would have come as an additional construction cost signaling value when Lancashire was the world center for cotton manufacture. At the time when this mill was built, investment and speculation was running ahead of demand and investors would eventually lose out through overproduction and a shrinking market.

and watertight. In due course most of these buildings would be demolished and Photo 18 shows this process. In the foreground the mural adds theatricality to the location and contrasts the abandoned 'Brutalist' architecture.

Another theme included in the *First View* exhibitions were billboards erected at points along the road. Photo 19, was taken in Ancoats and shows a bare-chested Johnny Weissmüller holding two boxes of Swan Vesta matches. This iconic image looks strangely out of place though compositional elements are mirrored by the surrounding architecture. In his review in *Creative Camera* of the opening Cornerhouse exhibition (1986) David Lee comments:

The formal correspondences between a muscle man and a fire escape, and a flying object and a real airship far in the distance, hold the picture background static while cars speed by in front; 'rushing around all day' in the words of the advertisement. (Lee, 1987:36)

Photo 20 is taken behind an advertising hoarding showing recent tree planting, a theme continued in Photo 21 which is part of a greening project in Clayton Vale to cover an industrial tip previously used by the Stuart Street power station.³⁹ Other locations returned to for the *First View* included the underpass at the Oldham end of the road (Photo 22), the first charge set off to blow up the cooling towers of Slacks Valley power station (Photo 23), Dean Lane Station platforms with their newly installed futurist plastic shelters (Photo 24) and the Cloggers public house on Oldham road (Photo 25). The name acts as reminder of a past tradition now being replaced by the pneumatic tyre represented by the Jet service station on the other side of the road.

The large format photography gave attention to places not ordinarily considered as subjects for exhibition and detailed observation. This was a way to suggest that perhaps there are details contained in the infrastructure that can give clues to local identity which can be easily passed over or not recognised in the busy flow of passing life. I hoped this attention to detail could contribute to an extended reading of the photography if it was to be placed in an archive.

4.3 A Review of the *First View* Exhibition Edit.

³⁹ By the *Second View* the trees had become a fully grown wood and the stepped path had disappeared.

Appendix 2, 3, 4 and exhibition reviews 8.

The Cornerhouse in Manchester (director Sue Grayson Ford) was a newly established arts centre which had a programme of exhibitions that comprised of contemporary regional, national and international arts practice including photography. The audience consisted of a cosmopolitan mixed age group including a large resident student population. In contrast, Gallery Oldham (director Aileen McEvoy) was much more local and, being attached to the library, had strong links with local schools.

When I came to choose the prints for the *First View* exhibitions in Manchester and Oldham, I included some of the original research images to help add contextual information to support the large format photographs. I felt this approach helped add pace and made the work look less formal and élitist. The additional material had more of a street view look to suggest observed moments that anyone might encounter while passing along the road. This opened the work to the possibility of increased interaction with the audience drawing on their own experiences (an element that became increasingly important to the project as it developed).

The final exhibition consisted of 80 photographs. I was not interested in captioning the photography, I wanted the images to be open to interpretation, multilayered and not fixed. Krauss argued that the Surrealists thought that photographic practice constituted a form of 'text' freeing words from their descriptive role as 'caption' enabling images themselves to posit a system of open communication (Uzac, 1985:24). My intention was to give an overview which dealt with the complex diversity of what I had found. I would not expect each and every photograph to be read and remembered as separate statements from each other, but that the spectator could sample the images and form a collective idea about the ongoing redevelopment of this area. This approach was not always appreciated. David Lee, reviewing the exhibition in *Creative Camera* (1986) at the Cornerhouse, felt that:

His editing is woeful. A large number of easy pictures, repeating insights already thoroughly rehearsed, are included. Many seem to be there for no other reason than that the photographer didn't know what to leave out. Or perhaps it was because he wished to labour

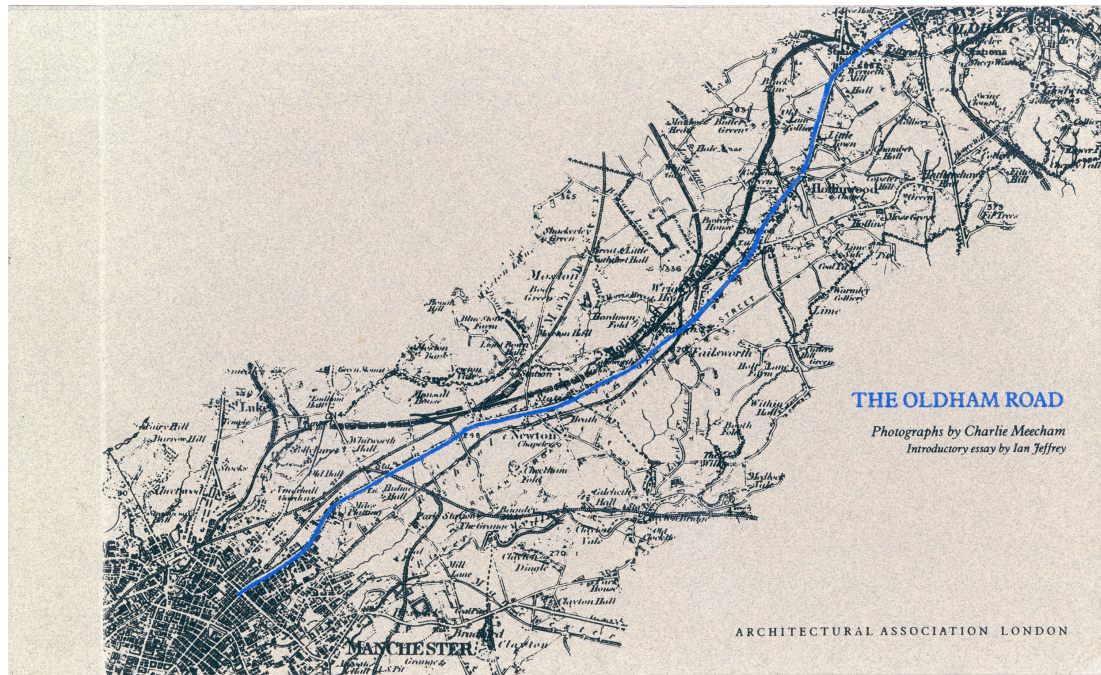
the point that to line up telegraph poles with buildings, to rhyme roof gables with staircases and to orchestrate his images with chimney stacks and lamp posts was, of itself, sufficient to merit selection. (Lee, 1986:36)

Lee was not impressed and did not feel the work reflected what he knew growing up in near by Salford. He comments that 'there is nothing intrinsically noteworthy about the Oldham Road' (1986:35) a view I would clearly dispute. In fact I think he completely missed the point because this was about a 'non place' one that was not being commented upon, just like other post-industrial areas in Britain at that time. In contrast, Ian Jeffrey reads the details in the photographs as clues and recognises the work as a survey of its time:

One of the conspicuous qualities of documentary in the 1980s is its disinterestedness under the terms of new naturalism – patient, thorough, reluctant to rush to judgement. The new documentarist, and Charlie Meecham is a new documentarist *par excellence*, is a surveyor rather than a legislator. Is it because the medium itself makes a certain attitude either possible or inevitable, or is observant disinterestedness in some way determined by current culture and its ideologies? Under such determinist premises as our own, the whole business unfolds, give or take the odd pause or two for manipulation of demand, according to the natural laws best left alone. We are free to predict those laws, known as market forces, and to watch their operation. Change, even if it involves ruination, is in the 1980s terms more or less natural, and can thus be considered dispassionately. 'Here', the photographs say, 'is a culture spectacularly in transition. Keep your eyes open.' (Jeffrey, 1987:9. Full book text Appendix 4)

Drawing on the detail contained in the photographs, Jeffrey describes what he sees as evidence and 'fall out' from what is happening at 'ground zero' brought about by the political changes of the mid 1980s as described in Chapter Three.

4.3.1 A description of The Oldham Road published by The Architectural Association, London.



The book published by the Architectural Association (1987) accompanied the *First View* exhibition when it was shown in London. The chairman (Alvin Boyarsky) was concerned that their students rarely, if ever, travelled to the North of England and had no idea what the regional architecture of the North West was like nor the changes taking place. The author and critic Ian Jeffrey was commissioned to write an accompanying text which is reprinted in Appendix 4. His detailed reading of some of the imagery adds context to what was happening in mid 1980s Britain at that time.

4.4 A description of research material and selected content for the *Second View* exhibitions and publication.

Appendix 5.

The *Second View* began in autumn of 2006, twenty-five years on from the start of the *First View* (1981). My aims were to consider what changes had taken place since the *First View* and how my experience as an older photographer (60

as opposed to 35 years of age) would affect my perception of place. I had become more knowledgeable regarding processes of rephotography and now wanted to draw on the experiences gained from the *First View* to act as a starting point for the *Second View* research. I was also aware that changes in technology had helped reframe photography and this encouraged me to find new ways for increased participation and where to place the work.

I began to explore the area very much as I had done before using a medium format film camera with no real plan in mind other than to re-familiarise myself with previously photographed locations. I chose to continue to use medium and large film formats as in the *First View* because I felt the need to maintain visual and practice links with the previous research so that the image quality would be similar and therefore more suitable for comparison. After several walks two things became immediately apparent. The first was that I had lost my bearings and sense of distance and scale. Places and specific architecture that were fixed in my memory were now not so easy to find and in some cases had been demolished. The second was that I felt a stranger to the place and consequently a little nervous and exposed. It took time to regain some of the previous familiarity. I had a sense of anticipation because there were new things to discover and there were no predictable outcomes.

At this time the country was still affected by the 2000-2001 European economic recession brought about by a previous overheated economy and a downturn in world trade. The following year on cuts in public spending meant that some new housing projects were put on hold and building sites became semi-abandoned. Since the *First View* more of the post-war social housing had been removed and there were grassed areas where the housing had originally stood. The Roxy Cinema in Hollinwood was now demolished along with the empty theatres included in the *First View*. The Roxy's demise came when the M60 motorway was built.

Areas, now in the hands of housing associations and development corporations in conjunction with local councils,⁴⁰ had begun extensive long term plans to redevelop the area. Despite the economic downturn, the development of the North Manchester Business Park together with a new tram station near Newton

⁴⁰ New East Manchester Development. <http://www.futurecommunities.net/case-studies/new-east-manchester-2001-2016>

Heath and the New Islington Development in Ancoats (C2.17-18) continued. These areas of redevelopment were intended to provide new education,⁴¹ housing and work environments close to the center of Manchester. ‘Chips’, a signature apartment block designed by Will Alsop for New Islington, had just been completed (C2.26-27).

In Failsworth and closer to Oldham there was further evidence of new housing, social amenities and retail including a Tesco supermarket and health center interspersed with clearance and landscaping around the reopened canal (C2.19, C2.22, C2.28). Individual improvements continued to be made to existing housing stock (C2.40-41). The new housing estates, included in the *First View*, now had fenced gardens (C2.96). I was surprised to find the extent of communal green spaces, created by reducing the housing density, which now had mature planting with fully grown trees (C2.22, C2.103-4).

A previously landscaped industrial area to the North of the road by the then GMC⁴² had now become wild and overgrown so much so that the area felt quite threatening (C2.12, C2.35, C2.68). In contrast, Clayton Vale, previously photographed showing new regimented tree planting (Appendix 2, photo 21) was now a popular recreational area (C2.28).

Some nineteenth century mills remained standing and in use (mainly as warehousing) while others continued to be demolished to make way for new projects such as the new Oasis Academy, Hollinwood (C2.32). Adjacent to the new school is an area that previously had been a slag heap and subsequently grassed over for local access. This area is now fenced and has been made into a sports area with no public access. There was evidence of some new retail activity along the road. Near Oldham, an overview shows new storage warehousing has replaced an earlier photographed mill complex (Appendix 2, photo 3) (C2.10).

I felt the road was becoming progressively less hospitable to pedestrians, who increasingly made only fleeting appearances to cross the road or stand at a bus stop. The remaining shops were becoming further isolated standing alongside the noisy and polluted road. To help indicate this, I began to adopt a formal

⁴¹ The Manchester College, One Central Park.

<http://www.themanchestercollege.ac.uk/locations/one-central-park>

⁴² Greater Manchester Council 1974–1986. (Accessed 2012)

method of making pictures from side roads at right angles to the Oldham Road (C2.54-55, C2.62). People and passing vehicles included in the photographs are often only hinted at as distant forms making a fleeting appearance crossing the gap (C2.47, C2.83).

While walking stretches of the road, I became aware of how cleared sections made the area appear more open and spacious. As a consequence, the residential community was becoming increasingly isolated within specific enclaves surrounded by open space partly to keep the traffic away from the housing (C2.57, C2.131). Adding to this, a greater number of properties along the road were either abandoned or had recently been cleared leaving additional empty fenced spaces. Some familiar buildings were clearly missed⁴³ but Tim Edensor notes that:

Such absences do not necessarily provoke an intense awareness of the loss of a familiar person, thing or place but rather promote an emphatic conjecture, an imaginative response to often obscure and vague signs that something is missing from where it used to be, though these absences may also be evidenced in archives and old photographs. (Edensor, 2012:2)

As the number of smaller business properties lining the road declined, some of the larger concerns have grown. The Wing Yip supermarket had expanded and several fast food outlets such as McDonalds had been recently built along with a Holiday Inn at Newton Heath and a large Tesco in Failsworth. I found that the previously abandoned and photographed paint shop near Ancoats (*First View* photo 4, *Second View* photo 3.2) was now demolished exposing the firewalls of the Victorian buildings behind and further back, the Co-op headquarters construction site, 1 Angel Square, which forms part of the NOMA estate⁴⁴ (C2.60).

The Oldham end of the road had undergone some widening but the general layout had not changed to a noticeable degree. The underpass was still the same except for the addition of a security camera and the newly planted trees in *First View* were now fully grown. There was major change at Hollinwood

⁴³Such as the Roxy Cinema in Hollinwood.

⁴⁴ NOMA refers to a twenty acre regeneration project of land owned by The Co-operative Group and Hermes Real Estate (North Manchester).

where a new M60 motorway junction (22) was now added. Apart from the demolition of the Roxy Cinema which had been a local landmark an area of Victorian housing North West of the road had also been demolished (C2.24).

Some previously photographed play areas were now semi-abandoned near to areas where further terraced housing was due for demolition (C2.78). In other areas new playgrounds had been added. A number of the photographs record continued evidence of past gardens and areas where wild plants were invading the crumbling spaces (C2.83). Also some images show increased use of fencing of empty space and also a number of alleyways were now gated (C2.106-107, C2.114). This alerted me to the need for increased security of property since the *First View* and subsequent restrictions on areas for play and places for older children to roam outside of institutional provision.

Clearance of residential housing behind the road and closer to Oldham (C2.38, C2.39) tended to make the remaining architecture appear isolated from its surroundings (C2.56). There were examples where remaining terraced areas continued to support local shops (C2.40-41) and this helped maintain social activity on the street. Conversely, the remaining shops lining the road were becoming isolated from the surrounding community. As with other parts of the country, competition from shopping centres and more accessible supermarkets were making it harder to support a diversity of shops enough to attract and sustain custom. Hollinwood was an exception which still maintained some smaller shops and pubs (C2.125-6) but the recently removed Roxy cinema contributed to less social activity (C2.119).

This description outlines examples of fieldwork undertaken during the *First* and *Second Views*. The contact sheets form part of the archive and allow for further reading. Images that I have not commented upon may have significance to others which I will be unaware of and could be revisited in a similar way to the process already begun using rephotography. The contact sheets are printed with white borders so that they can be marked up and additional observations can be added. The exhibitions consist of imagery that has been chosen at particular times and changes have been made regarding what could be shown in the spaces provided. I now go on to describe possible ways forward for group participation.

4.5. Introduction to Group Participation.

In Chapter One (1.3) I describe a *Second View* aim to develop participatory photography by local residents as co-creators and through elicitation of the photography (Harper: 2002) to discuss and value ongoing experience.

During the 1970s and early 80s there was a growing awareness that cultural diversity was not properly represented within the photo/visual arts and media context in the UK. Sunil Gupta adds that, 'at the same time, the formal photography education sector was shifting away from industrial training to a more theoretical and critical viewpoint, producing a first generation of what became 'independent' photographers' (Gupta in Harrison 2013:15).

Photography was seen as way to comment on issues to do with exclusion, identity, gender and race. Community-based photography projects such as the Side (Newcastle), Camerawork and Autograph, (London), Open eye, (Liverpool) helped make visible groups who were not normally seen. The Mount Pleasant Photography Workshop (latterly The Media Workshop), set up by Judy Harrison, provided cameras and darkroom facilities for children living in Asian and Black communities. In an interview with Sean Bonnell (2013), Harrison comments that "what photography did was allow them [the children] out onto the streets for a reason. Now grown up, a number of them have commented on the confidence and self-respect that experience gave them. It was a voice; the Asian and Black communities were not heard at that point" (Harrison: 26).

This prompted me to consider setting up a photography project involving members of the local community during the *Second View* so that they could visually contribute to the research. I felt that this would give me the opportunity to show examples of my work that could act as a catalyst as a starting point for them to make their own photographs. I felt this process would add a level of participation and draw upon insider experience so far lacking in the project. I contacted several older resident groups who were engaged in keeping fit and getting out and about who might be interested in participating. One walking group calling themselves the *Miles Plaiting Plodders* met twice a month and on one of those days would make a walk through their local lived in area. Another opportunity arose when I was asked if I could help a group of amateur

photographers in Newton Heath set up a photographic club. Lastly I contacted the St George's Youth Centre who also expressed interest.

4.5.1. *The Miles Platting Plodders and Have Your Say.*



Charlie Meecham, 2013. *The Miles Platting Plodders.*

The *Miles Platting Plodders* consisted mainly of an elderly group of women who went out on trips one day a week to visit places in the area and also to do walks in their immediate locality. I went out with them on two occasions to see if they could be persuaded to make some photographs to record their ongoing experience but found that this was presenting them with a burden that they were not that bothered to take on. (I did however lose a camera!) In the main this wonderful group of friends were just happy being out together and culminating on arriving at a suitable café for tea and cakes. Their process of regularly walking the area however maintained an ongoing dialogue with changes that were happening and conversations often revolved around memories of places where they had worked or had past associations.

Have Your Say Open Day 2013



Charlie Meecham.

This session organised by the publication *Have Your Say* brought together local residents to share photographs from their family albums and other materials such as posters and group photographs which were published for specific events such as parades and public celebrations.

In 2010 I attended a community gathering organised by *Have Your Say* magazine. At this well attended event, original family photographs and collected images of past events that had taken place in the area, were used to share their experiences. The local magazine had a broad readership who either lived locally or who had moved away but who still had fond memories of living



Have Your Say magazine cover, Christmas 2014.

and growing up in the Miles Platting area. The magazine was put together by a group of volunteers and relied heavily on the use of photography to jog memories.

The letters pages often contained requests to contact lost friends by those living abroad. I noted that often they would mention streets and past activities that no longer exist, as this letter describes:

Would you or anyone know of anyone who might have a photo of St. James Church on the corner of Teignmouth and Richardson Streets, Collyhurst? I lived on the opposite corner across from Cissie's shop. I do have a photo taken in 1972 just before its demolition without its wall! But I'd like one including the wall. We had a lot of fun climbing on and off that wall and being chased by Pop Henson for doing-so.
(*Have Your Say*, 2010, 35)

A number of enquiries sent into the magazine came from people who now lived outside the area who wished to get into contact with old friends. I found it interesting how the writers usually focused on particular places fixed in their memories. This process helped me to consider how this relates to one of my questions regarding if photography can help residents maintain connections by linking their experiential past through photography with the present even though gaps in the landscape have appeared and if so, where can I best place this rephotography project so that it can remain visible? The magazine closed in 2010 revealing the vulnerability often associated with voluntary organisations that do not have access to long term funding. But in the short term a replacement called *Once Upon A Time* magazine retains most of its ideals.

4.5.2 The Newton Heath Photography Group.

In 2012 following on from my brief experience with the Miles Platting Plodders, I next met the newly formed Newton Heath Photography Society who I hoped might respond more positively to taking part in the rephotography project. As an introduction, I described my role as photographer and position as an outsider who wished to search for visual clues that might collectively describe the area between Oldham and Manchester and how it used to be. The group discussed how the location of schools and places of work and worship acted as markers alongside childhood memories of growing up on the street. The photographs helped remind them of day-to-day ritual and particular events or customs such as saints' day parades. This older group, interested in learning new

photographic skills, was set up to consider how they might create an archive of photographs that referenced the area around Newton Heath.

As an introduction, I showed them photographs from the *First View* to help give a sense of the possible range of subjects that might be considered suitable. This prompted a discussion as to how things had changed in such a short time (twenty-five years). However, it was hard to persuade the members to adopt a more experimental approach to what they were already used to seeing. This was partly because they were interested in finding out how to 'improve' their technique along the lines of already accepted standards as laid out by existing photographic societies and also because most of them were also members of the local History Group. This meant that often conversation was generated from images of demolished buildings rather than more incidental references to existing infrastructure. As a result, they were primarily interested in making photographs of architecture prior to removal. Their intention was more directed to make new photographs that could be compared to archived imagery from the turn of the nineteenth century to show how things have changed over longer periods of time.

4.5.3 Reviewing the photography made by the Newton Heath group.

Not all the members of the group engaged with this project but those that did worked in different ways and they were keen to generate material that would be suitable as an archive. One member of the group was fascinated by early maps and so would compare them to more recent maps as a way to describe change to support his photography. Some members of the group did make work that appeared more reflective of the day-to-day but in general I could not persuade them to value this imagery in the same way as more pictorial stylised imagery which traditionally could have been submitted for competition. The group did understand what I was attempting through the *Oldham Road Project* and were always keen to see recent images which they would then comment upon – usually to do with their own ongoing experience of place. There was some re-photography and one member decided to make a record of all the pubs open and closed through the area. One member made a series of photographs close to where he lived which included sites of interest. These were shown in the Gallery Oldham exhibition as a digital slide presentation that include examples

of nineteenth century photography from the Manchester City library archive. In conclusion, I feel that I failed to energise the group to consider subject matter that responded to the more everyday side of life and so did not fit with my approach to the project. However the work generated by the following group did fit and examples are now in the archive.

4.5.4 The St George's Youth Group.

In contrast to the contribution made by the older participants, I also included photographs made by members of a youth group based at St George's in Collyhurst in the *Second View* exhibitions. The center is located alongside the Manchester end of the road and provides a place for the young people to gather in the evenings and participate in a range of organised activities and so did not see my project as anything particularly out of the ordinary. As an introduction, I showed them a series of photographs exhibited from the *First View* and then some examples of recent work taken in their area. I found the group lively and interested but fairly quiet about the photographs they were shown though they recognised familiar buildings and wished to learn where their project leader once lived before the area was redeveloped. They were keen to make their own photographs with the six digital cameras that I brought with me and after they were shown the technical functions I then left them to get on and photograph whatever way they felt comfortable with. When we met two weeks later the images were downloaded onto a laptop and the cameras were either handed back or passed onto others.

4.5.5 Reviewing the photography by the St George's Youth Group. Appendix 6.

The images were more spontaneous and less formal than those taken by the older groups as might be expected and also included interaction with each other. The photographs gave an account of the locality in which they lived and include photographs taken in their home environment and surrounding streets in Miles Platting. A number of photographs show fenced areas and pathways that they use to access the area. Also restriction notices, cars, back gardens and games such as football and night time imagery. The project ran for six weeks which culminated in a group get together when the complete set of photographs were projected for everyone to see. We jointly made a selection from these

photographs for the *Second View* exhibitions. Overall their work looked bright and optimistic and playful although some of the images show examples of a restricted and fenced environment. An edited set of their photography now forms part of the archive which I hope will be added to by other groups either organised through youth centres or by local schools. A blog might also be managed so that individuals could participate.



Mark, 2013. *Fenced Gardens*.

4.6 A review of the Exhibition at Gallery Oldham and the People's History Museum Manchester

Appendix 7.

The photography selected for the *Second View* exhibitions consisted of a combination of images from the *First View* (1986-89) and *Second View* (2009-12) projects. Due to restrictions of space, not all the photographs made for exhibition were displayed at any one time however the complete set is in the

Gallery Oldham collection and a digitised version will be made available as a PDF download.

The *Second View* exhibition opened at Gallery Oldham in December 2011 and consisted of an edited selection of photographs made across the two periods (1986-2012). Rather than making photographic C Type prints, I decided to make the images as consistent as possible by scanning all the chosen negatives from both views and making digital inkjet prints.



Charlie Meecham, 2014. *Second View* Gallery Oldham Installation.

The images were chosen from both film formats (6X7cm and 5X4 inch) which are proportionately similar and unlike the *First View* exhibition prints, were printed to the same size. The reason for this was that I wanted all the images (large or smaller format) to appear equally important. The printed image size was 20X24 inches onto 24X30 inch Somerset Satin paper. Although the emulsion of the films had changed during the photography of the two *views*, through the digital scanning and printing processes, I was able to make all the images appear reasonably consistent and matching in colour. In addition to the printed image, a year date was added to the bottom of each print in grey. This provided information as to when each photograph was taken but it was intended that the image would not be primarily categorised by date.

The photographs were sometimes displayed in two rows, with the before and after images in vertical pairs. The work was not framed and each image was attached to the wall by magnets. Subliminally, I hoped that the images would be viewed as 'working documents' rather than carefully composed artworks. This is not so effective in conventional gallery spaces which are often designed to exhibit curated and validated work which carry artistic values and discourse based on individual creativity. However, both Gallery Oldham and The People's History Museum have strong community connections and therefore draw a range of visitors expecting to see exhibitions that reflects on local experience including social history as opposed to an arts space. By the time I was ready to show the *Second View* exhibition I felt the People's History Museum was more appropriate as an exhibition space rather than a contemporary arts venue such as the Cornerhouse (now moved and renamed Home). I also felt that Gallery Oldham, with its strong community links, could also be an ideal location for housing the archive.

The visitors' book (complete record in appendix 8) for the Oldham show drew a range of responses such as:

Love it. The area around the DSS empty building is my neck of the woods, having attended 'Evanged Church' and the 'Faithworks' at 210. This now in disrepair but we still have keys if you wanted to get in and take photos. The original 'Bees Knees' dance floor and bars are still in place and wrought iron balconies. Sadly, it will soon have to go. (Visitor feedback age 32)

Also

One can only feel sympathetic towards the young in such a purposeless landscape – even the photographer seems at a loss. (Visitor feedback age 45)

And

Pleasing that someone has documented a dull area that is familiar with me and made relevant by this. (Anon)

This second comment suggests a recognition that there is a form of validation contained within the process of documentation which can help one to reflect on

day-to-day aspects of place similar to the reading suggested by Ian Jeffrey in his essay.

The exhibition was then moved to the community space of the People's History Museum in Manchester. The converted machine hall which now acts as an exhibition space was less formal than a conventional gallery and was a different environment in which to view the work. The public response in the comments book from the People's History Museum exhibit was more detached but the audience did pick up on the then and now aspect of the project:

The landscape of the Oldham Road has changed so much. It's sad to see so many great buildings disappear and become nothing but billboard signs. With a little investment places like the Playhouse could have been saved. Where's the Thunderdrome?

Another comment has resonance from the *First View* exhibition. On this occasion organisers from a youth group were critical in that they felt I had not told the whole story and should have included some of their views. By including photographs made by the St George's youth group for the *Second View*, this later comment suggests I have overcome that lack in my approach:

We had a great time at the museum finishing in this exhibition which is mainly about where we live and the community centre I voluntarily manage. Great exhibition, nice to see the young people's work in the show.

Also

A poignant collection of photographs. I think the juxtaposition of images highlights that a sense of community as well as urban decay and decline are not specific to any one decade or era but are present throughout history. It's interesting to see how pervasive advertising billboards have become.....a bit grim!

4.7 Evaluation: *Second View* and Exhibitions.

My intention was to evidence examples of topographic change over the twenty-five years which could be either dramatic or subtle. There were a few locations where it seemed appropriate to take the exact same photograph from the same

position but in others I preferred to include additional material that was previously excluded because it now seemed more relevant due to newly gained knowledge. Each photographic image also displays a year date and the selection includes an increased combination of film formats. Where a location was rephotographed with the large format camera the before and after images were displayed together so that direct visual comparisons could be made.

In practice, I found photographing from the exact same spot does encourage increased attention to detail. As with Klett and Davies, described in Chapter Three, this style of rephotography can help us reflect of our daily involvement with the changing landscape and to consider loss. The gaps created from demolition often leave few clues as to what had previously existed (example comparison images include the demolition of the Miles Platting maisonettes flanked by a gasometer (Appendix 7 and described in Chapter 2.4) the demolished house in Argus Street, Hollinwood (40.2 and 41.2) and the playhouse (62.2 and 63.2) enlarged example photographs Appendix 10. At other locations I have slightly changed the position or view from the camera. For example, the underpass on the approach to Oldham was photographed to include the tower blocks to the left (82.2). By the *Second View* they had become obscured by mature trees making the walkway further enclosed and perhaps less safe, necessitating the installation of a security camera (83.2). Changes to the Wing Yip supermarket required a different camera position to include the newly enlarged building and its changed relationship to the road (86.2 and 87.2). Some further locations previously photographed on smaller formats were also revisited with the larger format camera. However it became apparent as the *Second View* progressed that any rules that might have applied to the *First View* regarding choice of photographic formats now changed to what seemed appropriate to maintain a sense of encounter with the day-to-day.

Ideas generated from the participatory groups had also encouraged me to expand my approach with regard to the formality of the research as mentioned in the Methodology Chapter Two (2.3). For instance, the photographs made by the youth group appeared both immediate and spontaneous. This led me to consider how these photographs could be seen as a starting point contributing to an ongoing rephotographic process as part of a more inclusive Oldham Road Project. In the concluding Chapter Five, I return to this idea and propose that

by keeping this process open, new work could be added to by others as a way to prevent this project from being viewed as fixed and singularly archived history.

This chapter has described the photography for the *First* and *Second Views* and the editing processes for subsequent exhibitions. Chapter Five will sum up and answer the questions posed in Chapter One drawing upon the findings and will propose how this process of rephotography can be adopted for future projects.

5 – Conclusion - The Oldham Road Rephotography Archive and Future Research

This final chapter describes the major outcome of the research, which is the Oldham Road Rephotography Archive.

5.1. The Archive.

In recent years museums have sought funding to digitise their archives so as to make their collections more visible. The main users of this material are schools and fellow researchers. This form of access often carries restrictions regarding its use for further publication. The visual arts are particularly restrictive due to loan restrictions and copyright. This rephotography project does not carry any restrictions for non-profit use. The *Oldham Road* archive goes further by inviting additional material to be added so that changes and contemporary debate are seen as an ongoing process. My experience of working on past projects is that they almost always have financial limitations which encapsulates and historicises the activity between start and finish dates. This work is placed with Gallery Oldham who will make sure that it is made visible and primarily seen in a local context. From time to time example photographs will be displayed to help make it available to visitors as part of their other library services. Also the photographs will be published in accessible formats for printing out from the web. In this way I hope that communities experiencing similar changing pressures will gain inspiration to develop their own projects.

This PhD commentary has reviewed a major rephotography project based on an area along the A62 which connects Manchester to Oldham, a corridor route, which I considered invisible and between places, a seeming 'non place'. The photography, made in two phases (*First View*, 1986-89 and *Second View*, 2009-12), acts as documentation revealing aspects of layered histories that play out alongside each other on the street and this became more apparent as the project progressed.

The commentary investigates how this project came to be realised and what the practice of 'rephotography' contributes as a visual research method when analysing social change. External pre-conceptions of this locality tended to be based on historic imagery which was outdated and stylised. As with other working communities in industrial parts of the UK, the areas around the Oldham

Road retained a sense of community connected to previous working patterns, collective memory and family histories which was undervalued. The research questions how topographic images can help to depict aspects of place that are important to a community affected by external interests but which remain hidden in generic representations. I wanted to question if rephotography, as a method, can reveal insights about shifting notions of 'place' and consequently help residents adapt to social and economic change in post-industrial areas undergoing redevelopment.

The *First View* photographic research project was initially conducted by making a series of visits to the area each year recording transformation through redevelopment projects and subtler changes such as incidental events on the street and the variations of seasons. A selection of photographs from *First View* became a touring exhibition shown in Oldham and Manchester (1986-87) and then in London. A book was also published by the Architectural Association (1987) with an introduction by Ian Jeffrey. My initial findings confirmed that the area was undergoing major structural change which was impacting on the local community in how it could maintain a sense of local identity. I found that the removal of run-down and abandoned infrastructure was leaving gaps that were both physical and social linked to memory and loss. Responses to the exhibitions helped me review my practice and to consider what processes I could adopt to further describe what was happening. I grew to understand this as shared experience with other post-industrial areas of Britain.

The *Second View* (2009-12) revisits the first survey and considers what happened after. Twenty-five years on I wanted to consider how the continued process of change may have increasingly eroded/alterd the sense of place within the community. Since the *First View* a number of external factors influenced how the later research took shape. The political scene had changed with the introduction of private initiatives and housing associations taking responsibility to manage and refurbish aging housing stock in the public sector closer to the Manchester and in areas towards Oldham. Further cleared areas remained undeveloped due to a major financial downturn. Also, the adoption of digital technologies had changed how photography was made, viewed and used. This led me to consider how the *Second View* could be more

collaborative (Kester, 2011) and so modify my method and find new ways to interact with members of the community helping to inform the work.

5.2 Reviewing the research questions.

1. How can rephotography contribute to an understanding of processes of urban development and regeneration in a historical and social context?

The photography made during the two *views* acts as a record of changes that have taken place over the period of time that the research project was conducted. Although it can be argued that all photographic practice contains elements of rephotography, this project contributes to original knowledge through analysis of processes used to make the first long-term comparative and detailed photographic study of the *Oldham Road* as an area demonstrating shift from industrialisation to service provision. As this commentary outlines, rephotography as a visual research method can produce an open-ended visualisation of place, one that acknowledges both historic and continuing experiential components to interpretation.

2. In what ways can rephotography help identify social connections with place that would otherwise be overlooked?

The photography has recorded details that show individual involvement and interaction with the local infrastructure and identifies locations that signify past and ongoing activities. This research demonstrates that through elicitation groups can interact with photographs to discuss what is depicted but also contribute further ideas based on memories of personal experiences not shown that might otherwise be forgotten. The *Oldham Road* photography includes images of abandoned properties and cleared spaces. These images can act as bridges between before and after events. They can potentially help us see change as an ongoing process and might help to soften shock or a sense of dislocation. This ties in with my ideas regarding how imagery could help residents maintain a sense of place when personal markers are demolished because they have value to others. In effect their memories and experiences are validated through their reading of the photography thus confirming those spaces as symbolically owned by them.

3. Can rephotography also log changes in the way that photography is understood and used?

This project has been conducted over a period of technological change when processes of analogue photography have become digital and seamlessly connected to other forms of communication. We are increasingly aware of the value of a photograph as measured by intentionality, how it was made and where it is published. The authenticity and quality of images, as with any other form of communication, is often questioned. Imaging processes and their context encourages specific reading though the content may appear similar. While, for example, *Google Street View* has the capacity to record place in a systematic and narrative form so that locations can be quickly assessed, a similarly located *Oldham Road* image, as part of an ongoing survey, encourages further reading in connection with continuing processes of place. Physical works placed in archives are increasingly made available to be viewed at a distance on the web. In so doing, this research process has the capacity to make local/global connections sharing experience in other locations that might otherwise be inaccessible.

4. In what ways can the insights and understanding produced through rephotography become useful?

The *Oldham Road* corridor is now undergoing further changes as new projects by housing associations and globalised business begin to fill the spaces left by previous clearances. My published work, which was made within two decades, now shows connections, continuities and breakages and new questions emerge. What are the values that can be placed on the remaining fabric of a post-industrial region undergoing major structural change? What defines sense of place and what details are worth preserving for a future community rather than as focal points for an outside tourist industry? I propose that a continuing photographic element can contribute to further understandings that can influence a more sensitive management of infrastructure and also help residents adjust to change and thus maintain their sense of place.

This project proposes that building an ongoing rephotography archive could help residents map changes to their environment through their own lifetimes. They could then use the photography to point out significance when further changes are proposed by outside agencies that otherwise might be overlooked. The photography could be added to by anyone living locally or wishing to further investigate changes so that the archive does not become fixed but instead remains open as an ongoing visual discourse.

5. How can the accumulative photographic data be revised and reviewed?

Photographic images have become a visual language linked to everyday experiences easily captured (for instance on a mobile phone and not a dedicated camera) and disseminated instantly on social networks. This democratisation of the image is mainly seen as beneficial to help us share ideas and better understand the world. But intention still needs to be understood alongside these images as all photography is made and shared/shown for a purpose, and to understand the context for which it has been made is integral to interpretation, use and value. By placing the work in an open archive new ideas and experience can be added and already existing images revisited as new knowledge is sought. As with the children's game (spot the difference) the eye is encouraged to search for changed details across the *whole* image. The large format rephotography allows these details to show through and so helps make the images open to further reading.

This project has used rephotography to consider how photographs can be made and viewed as *open*, not closed down, so as to create debate that values memory and shared experience, encouraging a sense of ownership through diverse readings. The Oldham Road archive is a resource that can be used in the ways that have been looked at in this research but also has potential for further investigation.

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